

JANUARY, 1954

AND

# IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

JANUARY, 1954

35¢

IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

VOL. 5 NO. 1  
ISSUE NO. 26



**PERIL OF  
THE STARMEN**  
By KRIS NEVILLE

# Introducing the



# A U T H O R

★  
*Ross Rocklynne*  
★

I HAVE noted that every story is in a way a history of an author's life. Each story has some special little item of interest attached, and this in turn introduces chains of events that lead back about as far as one wishes to carry them. Such a story is X MARKS. My friend Elmer Perdue helped me somewhat with the technical end of it, and for this—thanks. Elmer, to trace it back, I first met in New York in 1939 at a science-fiction convention there, just as I first met hosts of other people whom I now know very well out here in Los Angeles. And, come to think of it, the initial idea of the story was first encountered about that time while I was a member of the Hell Pavers of Cincinnati where I lived.

The Hell Pavers—a magic name. Charlie Tanner, another science-fiction writer had charge of us bricklayers, if you understand the allusion, and like so many other such jawboning gangs, we solved the mysteries of the universe. Some of our secrets went into stories.

I had been prior to running into this coffee-guzzling outfit back in '38, a rather sad lone wolf of a science fiction writer and reader. I was, in fact, the opposite of my current protagonist Ralph Unterzuyder, who is clever, opportunistic, subtle, devious, and a manipulator of motives. I was not—and still am not—out of Gracian's Manual, but probably I wished then and now—that I were; for Unterzuyder, in other guises, has

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Volume 5

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*William L. Hamling*

Editor



*Frances Hamling*

Managing Editor



*Malcolm Smith*

Art Director



February Issue On Sale

December 29th

Front cover by W. E. Terry, illustrating PERIL OF THE STARMEN. Interior illustrations by W. E. Terry and H. W. McCauley. Cartoons by Vogel, Ludway, Kohler, and Scheffy. Astronomical photo, back cover, courtesy Mt. Wilson & Palomar Observatories.

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# The Editorial

SCIENCE fiction conventions come and go. Like all others, the 11th World Science Fiction Convention held in Philadelphia over the Labor Day weekend is now nothing but a memory. Some of the memories are pleasant; the renewal of old friendships with people you haven't seen in almost a year; the making of new friendships with people you hope you'll see again; the comradeship that existed for three days and nights as you lived, ate, and breathed science fiction. Those are perhaps the most important things about any gathering of kindred souls. And yet, now that it's all over we wonder if there shouldn't have been something more. Call it spectacle, pageant, glamor, or something else. Anyway, whatever it is, this past convention sorely lacked it.

MAYBE the fault lies in the word, "Convention". The big blowout we hold each year should be more than a fan get-together, conference, or elaborate bull session. That sort of thing can be held regionally (and usually is) throughout the year. It's ok to put on a pow-wow for local fans and visiting writers, for these want nothing more than the "party" atmosphere of crowded, smoke-filled rooms abounding with scintillating trade chatter and the tinkle of ice in glasses. It's especially all right for those who are "in the know"

and can gain admittance to such a room—usually by pass or special invitation. But what about the people who travel from far parts of the country to attend what they believe will be gala festivities as announced all year long in the various magazines? They spend hard-earned money to get there, assured that a "World Convention Program" is going to be something to see—to remember. The program, afterall, is the convention to them; nobody is handing out private party passes or invitations to reader Joe Doakes.

AS we see it, Philadelphia was a grand success as a science fiction pow-wow; it was also a miserable flop as a science fiction Convention. The program, in short, stunk.

IN Chicago in 1952 a real Convention took place. It was a star-studded spectacle all the way; the program was lavish—loaded with science fiction personalities from Nobel Prize winners down through publishers, editors, writers, and fans. There were items that took months of careful planning—a science fiction ballet under infrared lighting, to mention just one. There wasn't a single dull moment, and the more than a thousand people who attended went away with the feeling that they had seen something.

**I**N fan circles the "Chicon" took something of a beating, being termed a "professional" convention. Apparently this criticism bore weight with the Philadelphia committee, because they did everything they could to produce an "un-professional" convention. They succeeded admirably and thereby merit the applause of hard-core fandom. But the unknown science fictioneer from Lost Junction, Idaho, left the hall disillusioned. He had come a long way for nothing.

**W**E think it is high time that those in organized science fiction recognized the fact that a science fiction convention is not just a fan get-together—it is the big show of the year to which all readers are invited—for their particular benefit. If this is not to be the case then let us forget about publicizing the event to upwards of a hundred thousand people. Let's simply turn out circular letters to active fans and professionals and let it go at that. Let's stop calling it a "World Convention" if it's not going to be one.

**A** SUCCESSFUL convention—a Big Show—costs money to put on. It is the responsibility of the group sponsoring each yearly convention to not only be willing to, but capable of, spending enough money to put on a Show. Properly handled (via banquet, auction, raffle, bar kickback, etc.) the expenses can be met and balanced out. But it takes organization and planning—and work. Any city that bids for the annual site should be ready to accept this responsibility.

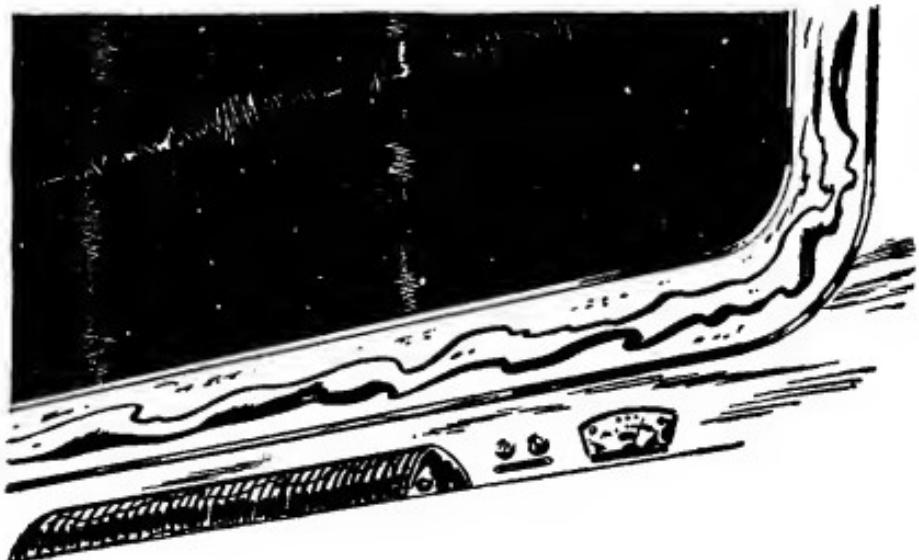
**W**E trust that 1954 in San Francisco will recapture the spectacle of Chicago in 1952. We expect great things of the Frisco committee after seeing their noble bid at the Chicon, which unfortunately they lost. But it is not too late to repair the damage of the Philcon failure. We caution them at this early date to ignore the aspersions directed at a "commercial convention" handled and/or attended by "dirty pros". Face the fact, gentlemen, that people come to a World Convention to be thrillingly entertained. If they're willing to spend money to travel there, they merit the lion's share of the planning—and that's the program.

**F**RISCO can do it if anybody can. We're waiting for the good word to that effect—and if we get it we'll plug the 12th World Science Fiction Convention to the hilt. The Big Show has a tent. Let's see the billing . . . . . wh



"By golly, it works!"





# Peril Of The Starmen

*By*

*Kris Neville*

**Their space ships landed near Washington,  
and they met Earthmen with friendly smiles. It  
was a great day — and quite possibly, our last!**

“I CALLED you three in,” the Oligarch said, “because I have some very important news.”

Herb—he would later be assigned that name—was one of the

three. He hated the Oligarch, and he had no doubt that the Oligarch knew it.

“There are,” the Oligarch said, “people on the planet. Unfortunately.”

Dull rage and frustration and despair and helplessness bubbled up in Herb. His face remained calm.

"We'll have to keep them from interfering with us," the Oligarch said.

Herb wanted to cry: Find another! Not this one! Not the only one we've ever found with people on it!

But he said nothing. His anguished thoughts whirled like a dust storm, handling and rejecting ideas like bits of paper. The remote and inaccessible Scientists were beyond accounting. Perhaps only this planet would serve. Perhaps there was insufficient time to locate another of suitable mass. Perhaps . . . But one could not know. One could only submit to authority. The storm died away, and Herb acknowledged bitter reality with helplessness. There even seemed a nightmare inevitability about the selection.

"It would be dangerous to try to work secretly," the Oligarch said. "If they were to discover us in the midst of planting the explosive, it would be fatal. We'll go down and ask their permission."

No one protested.

"To that end," the Oligarch said, "I have selected you three competent, trustworthy men. You will learn their language and when we

land, lull their natural suspicions. It will be your responsibility to see that we blow up the planet on schedule."

The crush of the responsibility was terrifying. "I don't need to tell you," the Oligarch said, "that you can't fail."

And it was true. Herb *believed*.

Unless the planet Earth were exploded, the ever-unstable Universe, itself, would collapse. Already the binding force was dangerously diminished. If new energy were not released within a month, disintegration would begin. The Universe would alter and flow and contract and after the collapse, slowly build itself into a new form—that form itself containing the inherent stresses of change and mutability. Only the arrival of starmen to space flight at the critical time—only their continued vigilance—prevented disaster beyond accounting for.

Herb *believed*.

## CHAPTER II

**W**ELL inside the solar system the huge space ship plunged on, released from the warp drive and slowly braking to establish an orbit around the third planet.

Herb came up from the deep stupor of the drugs. He had been under their influence for the last

twenty hours while the sleep tapes hammered information into his unconscious brain.

"All right," said Wezen, their private custodian, "time for exercise. Two hours of work-outs, and then you eat."

Herb sat up and felt his head. It ached dully. "Give me a minute. Time to think, Wezen. I'm—"

The other two starmen were also recovering.

"None of that! No time to think! Get up! Get up!"

Herb got reluctantly to his feet. Cold air washed over his nude body, and he trembled. He wanted to return to sleep, not the drugged sleep of the sleep tapes, but the genuine, untroubled sleep. Something frightening and alien was taking place in his mind.

He looked around for a dream form. It was a subconscious response. He realized with relief that it was not necessary to fill one in. Technically, he had not been asleep.

The Oligarch came to witness the first awakening. "How goes it, Wezen?"

"Fine."

"I don't know," Herb said. "My mind, it's . . . I can't think . . ."

One of the others said, "There's all kinds of information, but I can't get at it. I . . . can't . . . get . . . at . . . it." He looked

around desperately. "Every time I try, something new comes up. It's like a volcano. I can't control it. I think, the name of a river is Mississi—and then I know that leaves are green, and . . ."

"The sun is 93 million miles away. . . ."

"The day is divided into twenty-four equal periods of sixty minutes . . ."

"The largest ocean is the Pacific . . ."

"The Federal Government of the United States of America is composed of three independent branches . . ."

They were all talking at once.

"It's awful. Not to be able to control . . ."

"Good, good," said the Oligarch. He was satisfied with the progress. By the time they landed, they would be little more than mechanisms designed to answer questions; they would not be able to think at all: they would *respond*. Stimuli-response.

"Freedom," said the Oligarch.

"Is," Herb found himself saying, "is the basis of any government that governs justly."

Wezen made a little intake of air that was loud in the shocked silence.

"I said that," Herb said unbelievingly.

"Excellent," said the Oligarch.

"The proper reaction."

Wezen relaxed, but he was visibly shaken. He had *heard* the heresy. What might happen to him later, when this job was done?

"The indoctrination is beginning nicely." The Oligarch nodded. They would be able to sooth suspicion and dispel fear when they arrived on Earth. They would speak of love and assistance when the time came. "But you still have much to learn."

"You have a lot of information about them," Herb said. "Their history . . . their . . . You got it just in the last few days from their radio and television shows? I don't see how . . ."

"We extrapolate; there are machines," the Oligarch said. He regarded Herb narrowly. "I believe we better step up the pace." He was not going to give Herb time to rest, to think, to understand, to correlate the mind staggering mass of information he was receiving. "Let's hurry to the recreation room for calisthenics."

In the corridor, Herb glanced around for microphones and saw he was in an unwired stretch. He turned to the starman beside him. Their eyes met. Identical information had been fed simultaneously to both of them. "You heard what I said?"

"Yes."

"What kind of a place is this, this Earth?"

The other strained to think. "It's . . . It's . . . I don't believe it."

"All men are created equal," Herb said.

"And they hold these truths to be self evident . . ."

"Nor make any laws abridging . . ."

"Shhhh!" the third starman whispered. "Microphones up here."

They fell silent.

THE Oligarch went to his state-room and ordered a meal. He had been indoctrinated by the sleep tapes about Earth well over a Brionimanian year previously. The tapes had been brought back by an extensive scouting expedition composed solely of Oligarchs.

He found them a naive race. Weakness, of course, was their short coming. As was often the case. He imagined his hand touching the lever that would trigger the explosive. He saw, in imagination, the planet fly asunder.

He had destroyed before. Five races had died beneath his hands. And now—

Perhaps, he thought, I am growing old. Why is it I do not want to destroy this race myself? Am I becoming weak?

He was angry with himself.

Weakness! he thought. I'm acting like a subject, he thought. *I'm an Oligarch.*

Oligarch, he thought.

Five races, and now the sixth...

Where will it end? he thought.

*It will never end.*

Slowly the smile came. We are supreme, he thought, the lords and masters, and it will never end.

His scalp prickled with destiny.

Five races. He saw his hand reach out for the sixth.

He shuddered. Weeks ago he had reached his decision.

Bleakly he thought: I can't do it.

Perspiration crept down his spine. If a planet were not blown up, the whole fabric of his society would collapse. Brionimar must never learn.

But Brionimar *would* learn. Earth was on the verge of space flight. Within a generation they would be listening for radio and television extension-waves in hyperspace that would indicate the existence of another civilization. In two generations they would be in the skies of Brionimar. And then the subjects would see salvation: here (they would reason) is another race capable of preserving the Universe. And there would be no appeasing their blind and mindless wrath until the last Oligarch was dismembered and bloodless.

His hand reached out and curled around an imaginary lever. It must be done, he thought. But not by me. Not by me. Not this hand. He looked down at his hands: white and immaculate and always clean. He washed them frequently.

Someone else must pull the lever,

*I must leave a man behind at the bomb site to do it*, he thought.

Psychology was a science on Brionimar; and he was a scientist. There was only one man he could be sure of out of all the crew. There were several fanatics, but he distrusted them. There was one idealist who would, of a psychological certainty, pull that lever and blow himself up along with Earth in the belief that his action was necessary to preserve the Universe.

Herb.

### CHAPTER III

WHEN the starmen came, they made headlines in the newspapers all over the world.

They sat down on the east-west runway of the Washington National Airport.

MEN FROM STARS LAND!

And shortly:

FIRST CONTACT REVEALS  
STARMEN HUMANOID!

GENERAL SAYS ARMY  
READY IF STARMEN MEN-

## ACE!

EARTH WARNS VISITORS!

And on the heels of these:

UNEASINESS SPREADS!

STARMEN SAY PEACE

THEIR MISSION!

NO INVASION, SAYS WILKERSON!

PEACE, SAY STARMEN!

And a few hours later:

CONGRESS TO MEET!

CONGRESS FORMS COMMITTEE: WILL REPORT FINDINGS TO AMERICAN PEOPLE!

STARMEN SAY PEACE BETWEEN WORLDS!

Fear and faith combined; courage and cowardice; hatred and optimism. The great ground swell of popular approval was to come much later. At first there was naked uncertainty. Could the starmen be trusted?

And suppose they could be trusted?

Suppose that.

What then?

What?

Many were afraid.

Bud Council, freshman senator from the state of Missouri, was one of them. In the course of events he was to be assigned to the Committee to investigate the Starmen. A weak man, a fearful man, and as such, a dangerous man . . .

## CHAPTER IV

FROM his initial statement it was obvious that Bud sided with the group determined to oppose all contact with the starmen. His reaction was more frantic than most. He awoke at night from a soggy dream of terror. *Let us alone*, he sobbed, trembling. *Let us alone*. The future, once so secure, was now a veiled menace. *Go away*, he whispered into the night, *let us alone*. *We don't want you. Go away*.

He appeared sleepless for the first hearing. The three starmen filed in. He hated them.

They testified.

Herb, in the witness stand, peered out at the swarm of white faces; his head turned automatically from interrogator to interrogator.

"Our government is a modified democracy, much as your own, containing strong safe guards for individual liberty and civil rights," Herb said. One would need to look deeply into his eyes to detect the dullness and the depersonalization that was the true index to the words.

His thoughts were fuzzy, floating upon the periphery of his immediate existence. A detached part of himself seemed to observe and record the proceedings without understanding them; there was a

fever of information inside of him.

"We believe in the mutual exchange of knowledge. As proof of our good will, we will be glad to send in a team of scientists . . ." And later: "Our aim is mutually profitable trade."

He rested. One of the star-men took the stand. The drone and whine of voices lulled Herb. He wanted to relax, to sleep, to recover, to become master of himself once again.

After a recess, he found himself once more on the stand. Senator Rawlins, a thin, nervous mid-Westerner, began a line of inquiry. Herb tested his fingers, feeling the comforting reality of the hard chair arm. He explored the surface with childish wonder while his voice responded and waited and responded. Dimly, persistently, doggedly, stubbornly the ego, the self—that small spark of assertiveness and awafeness—struggled to arrange and order, to reason and make sense of—to unify and master—the knowledge it possessed. The consistency with which his spoken lies appealed to human prejudice should have made him realize the extent to which the Oligarchy was experienced in dealing with alien civilizations and the extent to which they had prepared specifically to confront this one. But he was aware only of the sound of his voice. The words fell

away into some lost abyss of confusion.

"But the theory behind this, now?" Senator Rawlins said.

"I'm sorry, sir. We are technicians aboard this expedition. We have very little to do with the theoretical aspects. That's up to the Scientists."

"Well, you are, sir, familiar with the idea that—we'll say—that light has limited velocity?"

"Yes, sir, that is correct. It wouldn't make sense for it to have infinite velocity, to be instantaneously everywhere." A tiny sense of urgency formed in his mind.

"Are you familiar with the fact that the speed of light is a limiting factor? Nothing in the natural Universe goes faster than light."

"I couldn't say, sir, I really don't know. At an extremely high speed our space ship makes a, a *transition*, but . . . I guess, sir, yes, sir." The answers weren't coming now. The Oligarch had not dared permit him scientific knowledge. There was a little vacuum where there should be information.

"You'll pardon me, but aren't you unusually ignorant, for a technician, about physical theory: about the action of gases that we were talking about a moment ago—in fact, even about astronomy?"

Herb did not say that such pursuits were the exclusive prerogatives of the Oligarchs. He did not

say: I am inferior in mental capacity to an Oligarch; I can never become a Scientist. That was not to be mentioned. "I am a technician, sir."

Senator Rawlins shook his head and made a few notes.

There was fear somewhere inside of him. What more could he say? Suppose . . . suppose . . . Had he answered wrong? It was as if his knowledge were a river rushing his ego toward the great waterfall of defeat, and he was powerless to control anything. He must not fail. Must not, must not, must not fail.

The imminence of collapse made the very sky terrifying, to know that this apparent order could crumble, and planets fly from suns, and suns themselves spin blindly nowhere. Every word before the Committee was vital. The whole wheeling order of existence turned upon it.

He felt the wood beneath his finger tips, smooth and cool and solid.

THE second day of the open hearing, Norma flew down from Vermont to reason with Bud.

Bud was gracious. Years in politics had taught him to mask his real feelings; taught him so well that he was no longer at all sure what his real feelings were.

The outbursts of anger and sup-

pressed sadism he unleashed on those closest to him always the morning after confused him and left him feeling that the person of the previous day had been someone distinct and separate from his genuine self.

"It's good to see you," he said. A warm, brotherly and artificial love flattered his sense of rectitude. He considered her the baby of the family. He remembered her as a gawky, frightened girl giving a last long glance at the security of the living room before venturing into the night of her first date. "I've been meaning to get up your way." His hands signaled the extent of his confinement to Washington. "There's so much to do, you can't imagine. I have to take work home with me. I'm sometimes up half the night with it . . . I've been hearing about you. Very fine, Norma, very fine."

Norma was tense and uncomfortable and, Bud thought, a little overawed to be sitting across the desk from her own brother in the rebuilt Senate Office Building.

She blinked nervously. "Frank will be in this afternoon."

"Yes. Yes?" A trace of petulance haunted Bud's voice. "Terribly busy just now, but . . ." Hollow enthusiasm conquered. "That's just fine. I can always find time to see Frank."

"He thinks it's important that

he see you," Norma said.

"Has something happened?" Bud always sought ways to escape from the anticipated responsibility of sharing a family crisis.

"We want to talk to you."

"I don't quite understand, Norma. What are you talking about?"

"These hearings, Bud."

Instantly the Senator felt the crush of the whole family arrayed against him, and he wanted to snarl at her in shame and anger and shout, "Leave me alone! Leave me alone! Leave me alone, for Chrissake!"

"They've got space flight. We can't even begin to guess what else they've got. What does Senator Stilson do? And you're there on his side, right with him!"

Bud puffed his cheeks and his skin grew hot and prickly. *It's none of your damned business*, he thought viciously.

"They have space flight," she repeated doggedly. "Think what that would mean to us."

"I haven't time to discuss it right now, Sis. We'll have to talk this out later." He stood up, anger pounding in his temples.

She stood with him. "Tonight. You and I and Frank."

"I don't quite see how . . ." His voice was weary, and he let the sentence hang short of blunt refusal.

"Tonight, Bud. We've got to

see you tonight. He's flying in."

"Well . . ." he sighed resignedly. "My place, then. I'll see you at, nine o'clock there."

"That will be fine."

"Nine, then. I've got to rush. My place at nine."

"Goodby, Bud."

LESS than an hour later flash bulbs popped from all corners of the room as the starmen entered for their second session of questioning.

Chairman Stilson, in a peevishly thin voice, limited the photographers to ten minutes and ruled against pictures during the questioning. After nearly half an hour, the hearing got under way.

Herb was first on the stand. He continued in the same fashion as yesterday. His answers were polite and informative. Senator Stilson's attempt to get him to contradict himself proved unfruitful. Herb surrendered the chair to one of the others and returned to his seat at the long table reserved for the starmen.

The hearing droned on. He no longer listened. He wanted to sleep.

"Yes," said the starman who was testifying, "that is correct. One of our main reasons for making this expedition is to offer you technological information: space flight, medicine . . ."

" . . . eventually trade . . . "

"Initiate a cultural exchange at the first practical moment . . . "

Herb heard someone say: "But we have limited facilities on this expedition. A larger one, with your permission, will be dispatched for Earth within a year." He was not even sure whether it was he who was speaking. "In the meantime, we would like permission to conduct certain scientific tests on the surface . . . A mineral analysis, sir, primarily. But we are interested in geological evidence . . . "

" . . . whether or not," someone said, "the physical similarity of our two races is due to parallel evolution or to a forgotten, prehistoric cycle of colonization by a common ancestor . . . "

" . . . These tests can be completed within a few days . . . "

"In return, sir, we offer . . . "

" . . . We must leave within a week. We must have an answer before then."

They described their own planet and their own civilization. They made an excellent impression.

When it was Bud's turn to question, he asked Herb: "How do we know—here, you've learned the language, so much about us and all—how do we know that this isn't a fabrication, a tissue of prevarications you're telling the American people here today? We have

to take everything on faith. Now, you know so much about us, you have studied us . . . "

"We have only a week . . . " Herb replied.

THEY were waiting for Bud at nine o'clock. He was late.

"I'm sorry," Bud said. "Came as quickly as I could. I was at a secret session . . . But for a brother and sister, well, I just had to leave . . . "

"We appreciate it, Bud," Norma said.

"Drink, anybody?"

"No, thanks," Frank said.

Norma shook her head.

"Mind if I have one? I'm rather upset today—the hearings and all, the meeting tonight . . . "

He went to his bar.

Frank was on the sofa. His gaunt, heavy boned body waited motionless. His blunt fingered, surgeon's hands lay unmoving. His skin was tanned from the Oklahoma sun. Norma sat stiffly erect in the overstuffed chair.

"I guess you know what we want to see you about," Frank said.

Bud poured carefully without looking around. "Norma said something about the starmen. Terrifying thing, terrifying thing. You think they'll really leave when we tell them to?"

"I don't see there's much we can do about it if they make up their

minds to stay," Frank said.

"Look, Bud," Norma said, "think how far ahead of us they are. They must be friendly, they must be sincere in their offer to help us."

Bud shook his head. "My deep and sincere conviction on this is that it's a matter of our pride and our independence and our freedom. They're all at stake. I mean—" He waved helplessly. "You know how I feel. I mean, my views are in all the papers, in the *Record*. With me it's a matter of principle. I don't see how we can accept that sort of offer. It's degrading."

"If we tell them to leave, to go away, to leave us alone, we've lost the greatest opportunity in history." Norma insisted.

"Norma," Bud said. "You know how I feel about you. You know I'd do anything in the world for either of you. Anything within my power. All you need do is ask. Money, anything. But this . . . this . . . We're proud. Mankind is proud." His heart swelled with the beauty of renunciation and righteousness. "We're too proud, too independent, too *free*. I would not be willing to sacrifice those great, eternal truths, those historic principles that are the foundation of our way of life, that have made America great: dignity, pride, self reliance . . ."

"I think they have about the

same metabolism as humans," Frank said. "Speaking as a medical man, I believe if they'd give us their medical knowledge, we could conquer disease on Earth. And with their technology—"

"We are a proud race," Bud said. "We must cling to that. That is more precious than gold."

When Frank spoke, there was a mixture of contempt and terror in his voice. "Bud, you're a monument to the basic anarchy of the American people."

"Frank!" Norma cried.

"He is. If the people paid any attention to what they were doing, do you think they'd elect a man like that?"

Bud's mind darted frantically. What was happening here? What was behind this? Why was Frank, his own brother, out to get him? What sinister motive—?

"You underestimate them, though," Frank said. "There's a little trickle of maturity in this country. For every aberration like you it gains a drop of experience and knowledge. The war is over. We've had our emotional jag. We're about to go into one of our rational periods. We're about to wake up to our responsibilities. Your day is passing. I don't know if there's enough of you left to keep out the starmen. The people are coming around. But—I—do—know—this. I know . . ."

"Stop!" Norma cried. "You don't understand Bud! "You're trying to make him into something dishonest and cynical!"

"I've watched him come up. I've watched him for years. I've seen all the rotten deals he's pulled. I've seen him smear innocent people—ruin their careers—and all not for patriotism but for himself. To advance his career. Keep his name before the public. He doesn't care for anything but Bud. Bud, and any means to the end that he moves up, gets power—power for power's sake—power to create and destroy—power to change and control. I've watched him: I know him. I'm talking the only language he understands."

Bud was trembling. The sense of indignation, horror, and innocence was blunted by the shallow dryness of his breathing.

"Frank! Stop this! You're out of your mind!"

"I'm going to see you defeated in the next election, Bud. I'm going to dig up dirt, I'm going to find out who your mistresses are. I'm your brother. I'm going to hound you, disgrace you, drive you from office. You know me. You know I mean what I say. You know me. You know I mean what I say. *You know I will do it.*"

"What do you want? My, my God, Frank, what are you after?"

**F**RANK'S hands were shaking. His mouth worked nervously. "For once in my life, for once in my life I've got something all-the-way decent to fight for, and I mean to fight just as dirty as I have to get it. Bud, you're coming over to my side on this starmen hearing. You're going to vote for co-operation with them. Do you hear me? Do you hear what I say?"

Bud, his eyes bulging with shock and disbelief, shook his head dumbly. His own brother—this terror raging before him—impossible, his own brother . . . His heart pounded. His will was gone. "What do you want?" he repeated dryly.

"I told you."

"I—I—I'll have to think. I—I—"

"No you won't," Frank said. He stood before him now. "No, you won't."

Norma jumped between them. "Leave him alone!"

Bud snaked from behind her and fled to the bar. His unprotected back a crawling mass of chill, he poured himself a drink. "You're . . . you're upset, Frank. You've been, been overworked." He drank the drink in a feverish gulp. "Now . . ." his voice fluttered nervously. "I'll forget what you've said here tonight. I understand." His breathing was still tight and frightened.

"About the starmen. I haven't, I haven't really given the matter too, too much . . . attention. I still have an . . . I was just today thinking of . . . "

Frank started to speak.

"I can see both sides of the argument," Bud said rapidly. In the depth of his stomach he lived with the cold knowledge that Frank would stoop to anything—any lie, any distortion—to—defeat him. Frank could defeat him. It wasn't as if Frank were a stranger. It wasn't as if Bud had been in the Senate for years. No, he was a vulnerable freshman, and unscrupulous politicians back home were already . . . This was terrible. All his dreams of the future trembled on his words. He was physically afraid.

"Frank is upset!" Norma said frantically.

"Yes, yes," Bud murmured.

"Frank, you apologize! You hear me! Apologize!"

Frank and Bud found their eyes locked in a moment of silent communication, and seeing victory in the dull defeat inside of Bud, Frank said hoarsely, "I apologize, Bud. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said those things. I lost my head. I'm sorry."

They both knew it was no apology. The threat was still very much there.

## CHAPTER V

THE spider ships towered above the surrounding aircraft. Their construction was utilitarian; their living quarters were cramped; entrance was achieved from the ground by means of a retractable ladder from the base platform.

The underbelly dome contained the cutting ray. It could strike deep into the Earth, burning through shale and granite with equal efficiency. The portable casing could be sunk almost simultaneously; it would seem to contain the ray as a hose contains water. While like a giant rig, the ship would poise on its triple legs above the operation. As rapidly as the crew could section the casing, the drilling would proceed.

The three ships would form a triangle. Like insects sending down stingers they would, when the time came, lance three deep shafts into the Earth. Then down the casings would plunge the identical charges. Technicians could compute the point where the three shock waves would meet. A fourth ray would enter the Earth to the proper depth; and at that point would be buried the deadly atomic seed. At the proper time, the charges would be detonated. And where their waves met, under incredible heat and pressure, there

the chain reaction would begin, to explode, in an instant, the whole of the Earth.

The Oligarch summoned Herb. "You may sit at my table," he said.

Sleep laden, Herb sank down across from the Oligarch.

"The necessity for rushing them into a hasty decision is unfortunate," the Oligarch said.

Herb sat hating. The words scarcely penetrated into his confused being. The turmoil was worse than ever.

". . . I have been studying the reports. Three members of the Committee, as it stands now, oppose us. And listen . . ."

"Yes."

"They will be sure to try to end the hearings tomorrow."

"Yes," Herb repeated dully.

"It will go to the full Senate. We have requested a decision within a week. That may not be sufficient time for the popular sentiment of the country to crystallize in our favor. A few determined men may be able to defeat us."

Herb felt a little shudder crawl along his mind. Then his thoughts whirled away.

"It will be infinitely more difficult to win the crucial support of Senators Klein, Stilson and Council after the Committee hearings end. We must bring them to

our side. They have become the focal point of the opposition. We must prolong the Committee hearings until we have convinced them. If we can convince them, the full Senate will go along. We'll have ripped the heart out of the opposition."

Herb tried to concentrate on the reasoning. "Yes," he said.

"They will press for an immediate vote. They have known, even if they don't realize it consciously, that the longer they delay, the surer they are of being defeated."

"If we don't . . . can't . . .".

*I don't know, the Oligarch thought. I don't know. Threats? Try to plant the charges secretly? "We'll have to convince them. And we've got to do it within a week—maybe a little more, a day or two more."*

"What do we do? How? I mean, what do we tell them?" Herb's thoughts were like fog. He wished he could go back to sleep.

The Oligarch knew he was wasting his time explaining to Herb. He wished that he could go before the Committee, himself, but he dared not. Automatic reactions were far more consistent and convincing than his calculating deceit would be. *He could conceivably be caught in a lie. Not Herb.*

"I'll . . . I'll try . . ."

The Oligarch analyzed Herb's

potential. *Ten days. Ten days. If he becomes unreliable, where shall I find another?*

"We have almost three weeks," Herb said. "We could give them fifteen or sixteen days . . . We could plant the charges in one day . . ."

"You may as well go back to sleep, Herb."

"Yes."

Herb stood up and stumbled away.

The Oligarch returned to his cabin, washed his hands, and went to his desk.

He fumbled at the newspapers. He saw an editorial: "Council Makes Starmen Hearing Political Football." The people were slowly coming to the starmen's support, but how long, how long . . . ? He saw another headline: STARMEN POSSIBLE MENACE TO EARTH SOCIETY.

THE first thing Herb did upon arising the morning of the third hearing was to fill in his dream form. He had filled in thousands of them during his life, and yet it was always a frightening experience.

A chill of the Unknown confronted him.

Watchful eyes were, in a way, reassuring; planted microphones could be circumvented; spies

could be recognized. But the dream form could not be cheated.

What awful secrets did it reveal? Life and death hung in the balance. Somehow they could tell from the fantasy fiction of a dream how you felt about the reality around you: about the Oligarchy, about your job, about your family.

And they could tell when you lied.

And if you said you didn't dream.

Everyone on Brionimar dreamed.

If they didn't like your dreams, they shot you . . .

Even into his numb and information filled mind, terror crept as his pencil moved across the dream form.

He breakfasted in the messhall and then left for the hearing. As usual, there was a group of humans standing outside the guard lines, marveling at the three starships, standing upon spider legs, looking ready to whirl skyward at any sign of hostility. Far above, the interstellar ship waited in the coldness of space for the shuttle ships to complete their mission and return.

There was an unexpected buzz in the Committee Room when Herb and his two companions arrived.

An ugly television camera squat-

ted across from the Chairman's desk.

Bud had changed his vote on televising the hearings.

Herb watched Bud cross to Senator Stilson. Until this morning the two had seemed very friendly.

"Let's get together later," Bud was saying. "I'll explain my position. I'm sure you'll understand."

Senator Stilson refused to acknowledge that Bud was there.

"Look, Eddy, boy, don't act like that. Listen, I was thinking this over last night, and I think it's only right . . ."

"The Socialists have gotten to you, Bud. That's all there is to say."

Bud swallowed in shocked disbelief. "Oh, now . . ." More than anything else in the world Bud wanted to refute this slander. Desperation gripped him: *the socialists have gotten to you!* No! God damn you! Take that back, you son of a bitch! His hands clenched.

He swallowed again, stiffly, with difficulty. Relax. For the love of God, relax. "Oh, now . . ."

Senator Stilson walked away.

Bud sat down weakly. I'll show him, he thought. I'll . . . I'll . . . It was frightening to have Senator Stilson call you a Socialist.

Bud tried not to think about

Frank's face . . . Frank's threats had nothing to do with him changing his mind. A man can change his mind. That he *had* changed his mind seemed to Bud a measure of his honesty and fairness. It was nothing less than that.

One of the other starmen whispered to Herb: "That one's changed sides."

Herb nodded. The Senators were beginning to respond to pressure from their constituents. But even as the tension was sinking, even as elation rose, a second emotion swept through him. It was not enough to deceive those in this room. Now he must also lie to innocent watching millions all over the planet. His fists clenched. He hated Bud.

Early in his testimony he noticed a girl in the audience. There was something in her face that made his eyes return to it time after time. Gradually he came to concentrate exclusively on her and try to explain everything to her alone. He smiled uncertainly, and she smiled back encouragement.

And Norma—this situation suddenly became immediate and personal to her. She watched Herb, listening intently, wanting desperately to communicate her encouragement to him and her belief in him.

Bud caught a taxi to attend the executive session of the hearings that had been set for eight o'clock that evening. The starmen would not be present.

Bud was ill at ease. "Hurry up, damn it!" he snapped at his driver.

Telegrams from all over the country had been pouring into his office. They had awakened him to certain possibilities. His changed vote on television had brought him unprecedented publicity, even from normally hostile newspapers. He realized that the longer the hearings continued the more familiar his name would become.

He was convinced by now that the majority of the people (even as himself) were inclined to approve an agreement with the starmen.

Surely they weren't thinking of ending the hearings and taking the matter to the full Senate? They wouldn't dare flush headlines down the drain like that.

Would they?

He grumbled to himself. Of course they wouldn't. Here was a fulcrum, a lever . . . Look at the publicity . . . After all, another Missourian had made it from a Congressional Committee. Perhaps the starmen hearings had really seized the imagination of the American people . . . Harry S. Truman had made it . . .

He experienced a moral awakening, a sharp clear call to duty that transcended morality. All things changed. The world was suddenly portentious and thrilling, and secret enemies lurked and unseen disasters hovered.

His mind was humming with the exultation. He thought of himself dying at the end of his . . . sixth . . . eighth . . . tenth . . . term of office. He pictured the universal sorrow. He wanted to cry. They would mourn for a year; for two years. They would build huge monuments to his memory. Monuments bigger than any monuments ever built.

The taxi stopped.

Perhaps after forty years in office, he would be assassinated. The public wrath . . .

"Here we are," the driver said.

Getting out, he knew that he would fight to see the hearings continued.

He was late. Already the other four Senators were seated. Bud nodded to them and took his place. He put his brief case (it gave him a sense of importance to carry one) on the table before him and unzipped it as if to be ready to delve into its contents to document his every statement.

The atmosphere was tense. Bud looked from face to face. Senator

Stilson was granite hostility. Senator Gutenleigh avoided his eyes. Senator Klein glared at him truculently.

"It was called for eight," Senator Stilson said icily.

"Good evening, gentleman," he said. "Sorry I'm late."

"Good evening," Senator Rawlins said. "These gentlemen here," he included everyone but Bud in his gesture, "intend to dispense with a report and merely issue the Committee's recommendation. They've already decided to close the hearings and present the matter to the Senate tomorrow."

Bud was stunned. This was unbelievable. That meant . . . that . . . The friends! Somehow they had gotten to Gutenleigh, the Senator from Hawaii. Bud had counted on him—on the basis of his television vote—to oppose Klein and Stilson. What outrageous, Un-American pressure had been exerted to cause him to surrender?

"But . . . but . . . Senator Guten—"

"Has," Senator Stilson said in his thin, peevish tenor, "reconsidered."

Enmity and hostility flared silently from the Chairman. An almost baffled look crossed his face as if the implications had finally arrived in his consciousness: here was a Senator, Senator Coun-

cil, a member of—as he thought of it—his *team*, who had had the temerity to transgress his leadership. One would expect opposition from a radical like Rawlins. But from a Council . . . ! He had always felt that Bud was one of his. The insult was compounded by heresy.

"I feel," Senator Rawlins said, "that two questions require further exploration: how is it that the starmen are so ignorant of basic scientific principles; and for what reason do they insist that we reach such a momentous decision in such a limited time? To ask the Senate to vote now would force an honest man to perhaps a hasty decision. For myself, until these points are clarified, I would be very reluctant to reach any sort of an agreement with them. I want to ask this Committee to reconsider its decision, and I hope the Honorable Senator from Missouri will join with me, and that between us we can prevail upon the other gentlemen."

A sincere democrat, he spoke with quiet desperation, "In order to expect the people to choose wisely, we must be sure that they are given an opportunity to receive all the pertinent facts."

Bud was howling inwardly with the fury of a thwarted child. Headlines were flying away from him.

His stand in the full Senate would command only one one-hundredth of the attention it would receive here. He arose, trembling with rage.

Shaking a quivering finger at Senator Stilson he cried, "You have bribed Gutenleigh!"

Gutenleigh looked uncomfortable.

"What did they promise you, Sam?" he thundered, wondering wildly what counter promises he could make.

Even Senator Stilson was shocked by Bud's violent outburst. Bud was famous for his rabid thundering against subversives, but no one had expected him to have the courage to open such hysterical fire on his Senate colleagues. Senator Stilson said, "I resent your attitude, sir!"

"Gentlemen, Gentlemen," Senator Rawlins said. "A little moderation, please."

"I'm for them, damn you!" Bud cried. "You're all in a conspiracy—a filthy conspiracy—against me!"

"If you don't sit down, I will summon an officer and have you removed bodily from this Chamber," Senator Stilson said.

They were all looking at Bud. With a great display of reluctance, he sank to his seat. He refused to look at Senator Stilson. He sulked

and plotted revenge. And remembered Frank and hated everybody.

The vote proceeded routinely. Three members voted to recommend that the Senate reject the starmen's offer. Senator Rawlins abstained, and Bud voted that the Senate accept it.

The committee meeting broke up. Senators Klein and Stilson went out to gather up opposition Senators. They lobbied far into the night.

Nor was Bud to be outdone.

## CHAPTER VI

THE three spider ships waited in the late evening darkness. Only a few spectators loitered. The television cameras were quiet. Army sentries patrolled the area to keep the starmen inside and the curious out. Norma's heels clicked sharply on the runway as she approached. At the ropes she stopped and showed the guard the entry permit her brother had obtained for her.

"Come under," the guard said, lifting the rope.

"The one called Herb?"

"He's in that one over there."

She moved in the indicated direction. A moment before, the night had been warm. Now an uncomfortably chill breeze whispered around her as she moved in-

to the starship's shadow. The thought of the distance it had come, the countless millions of miles of space its hull had shed, was enough to dwarf her into less than insignificance. She wanted to run back to the guard, and to the protection of the familiar.

The ladder was down, and when she reached it, the door above opened and a starman looked out.

"I'd like to come up."

The starman went away. In a moment, he was back with one of the three who could speak English.

"I'd like to come up," Norma repeated.

"We've already given the official tour for today."

"I have an authorization from our government. I'd like to talk to Herb. You tell him I'm from Senator Council. It's about the report."

"Just a moment." He disappeared inside. Norma teetered nervously back and forth. Wonderingly she put out her hand to touch the hard, icy metal of the ladder.

"Come up."

She began to climb toward the opening. Looking behind her, she saw Washington, real and solid and reassuring.

The starman at the top helped her inside.

Herb was coming down the narrow corridor. She smiled at him.

"Hello."

"Hello . . . "

"I want to talk to you a moment."

He gestured her inside.

In the first room off the main corridor, Herb stopped. Several starmen hovered nearby to listen.

"Can I talk to you for just a couple of seconds alone?"

"Why—why, yes, I guess." He looked around for permission.

The Oligarch, towering imperiously on the fringe of the group, said, "Why don't you interview her in my office, Herb?

"Come along," Herb said.

In contrast to the Spartan plainness of the rest of the ship, the Oligarch's office was richly furnished. Its private corridor led past the messhall and opened upon the main corridor that led forward to the second level: it was strategically located; from its doorway, one could interdict entrance and escape.

It was the first time Herb had been in the room. Automatically his eyes searched the walls.

"Senator Council asked me to talk to you," Norma said. "He wants you to understand about the report. You've heard? It's going to the full Senate tomorrow. We'd like you to . . ."

"I'm only a technician, Miss."

"My name is Norma."

"Norma." His emotions were tangled beyond solution. He wanted to say, 'I'll stay behind when the others leave, will that make everything all right, you won't blame me, you won't blame me for it if I stay behind, will you?' His mind hurt with the confusion.

"We thought, if you'd go away, if the people thought we'd actually lost you . . ."

"It's not for me to make any kind of decision. I'll have to ask. Would that be all right, sir?"

Norma blinked. She did not understand to whom the question was addressed. Her eyes followed his to the wall, a concealed microphone? She felt a little prickle of fear.

The Oligarch stood in the doorway behind her. "That will be agreeable with us."

She whirled guiltily.

"Bud wanted to, to see Herb tonight . . ." Norma felt resentment against this man in the doorway. "I was told to bring Herb."

"I will be able to speak for my government."

"I was told to bring Herb," Norma said stubbornly. Bud had not specified, but she told herself that she would not yield to a stranger. She did not consider Herb a stranger. "Isn't it all right to take him?"

"He may come, too, if you

wish." He smiled. "Whatever you wish."

His voice was not reassuring. "Thank you." She modified her tone. Some of the iciness went out of it. "I'll leave now. Bud will send two C.I.D. men over for you."

**S**I TTING at his desk in his Georgetown apartment, Bud looked through a stack of letters.

Norma, waiting, tried to become interested in a *Saturday Evening Post* story and failed. She put the magazine aside.

The knock they were waiting for came.

Bud rose and crossed quickly to the door.

"Ah, hello," he said with a genial smile. "If you gentlemen will wait downstairs, I'll call you when they are ready to leave." The C.I.D. men withdrew. "Hello, young fellow. Herb, I believe? And?"

"George . . . How would George be?"

"George," the Senator said, pumping the Oligarch's hand and drawing him across the threshold. "I like your people's way of using first names. Very democratic. Just call me Bud."

They arranged themselves around the room.

"I don't suppose you'd care for a drink?"

"I'd be delighted," George said.

Bud, solemn faced, mixed the drinks, talking over his shoulder. "I hope you haven't taken our Committee report as a rejection of your generous offer . . . You understand? I want to explain my position—what we, you and I, can do . . . There we are." He turned from his labors and handed the drinks around.

"Norma, Herb. I wonder if you'd mind if George and I stepped in there?"

"It's all right with us," Norma said.

Bud and the Oligarch went into the study. Bud closed the door.

"Now," he said. Ambition was a sickness in him. *This is the boy I've got to sell*, he thought. That's all I've got to do: sell him. Once he's sold, the rest will follow. Ambition was like a hunger, and success hung in the air like smoke. "We can have a nice, private talk. I'm sure you'll appreciate my rather delicate position."

George swirled ice and smiled.

"Norma tells me you can speak for your government?"

George nodded.

"Let's sit down."

"Thank you."

"Now here's the way I feel about it. I'm on your team. We're both on the same team. I want to help you all I can, and I know

you'll want to help me."

George nodded.

"I was thinking: if you would leave. Not tell anybody. Leave tonight. I don't mean for good, but make it look that way. You see?"

"Our leaving would serve as an emotional shock?"

"Yes, exactly. Your leaving might be just what the people need to wake them up and get them on our team. I don't need to tell you that the Senate is likely to reject your offer. I mean, right now. The way things stand now. My first mail is coming in. It's predominantly unfavorable. But some telegrams I've gotten, I think the people are coming around. But they're still not around yet. We need a couple of weeks. My idea is, I'd like to be the one that—more or less—handles it."

"You want us to work through you?"

"You have put your finger on it, George. If there's just one Earthman you can trust and work through, who knows the ropes . . ."

"I believe I understand."

"And when you come back, you make it plain that it was Bud Council who brought you back—it was Bud Council who really convinced you to return."

"You and I," George said, "will

probably be able to work out a deal."

Jubilation rang in Bud's ears. This was it. The talk of working out a deal was an assurance of victory. President Bud—no, perhaps it would be better, more dignified, to be President *Phil*. He would write it out and see which looked best: President Philip Council or President Bud Council . . . History lay heavily upon his thoughts . . . For the first time he actually felt at home with a starman.

"Perhaps you would do something for us?" George said.

Bud found himself looking deep into George's eyes. Instinctively he knew that George knew him better than he knew himself, and that George had carefully studied him according to no one could tell what alien science.

"Why why, yes, yes, of course."

"Well," George said, rising and going to Bud and dropping a hand across his shoulder, "just to be sure that you really are on our team, perhaps you could give us a little token of loyalty."

Bud grew cold in anticipation. But the crowds cheering and the banners waving . . . No! Not now, they couldn't snatch it away now! What was it George wanted? Money? A signed agreement? Patronage? "Why, yes, naturally."

George's hand tightened in friendly reassurance. He knew that he had found his man. "Your brother's head. I believe his name is Frank. His head. We'll expect you to have it for us when we return in two weeks. Two weeks from tomorrow."

He no longer needed to count on Herb.

## CHAPTER VII

THE starmen had vanished into the night that is deepest just before dawn, when the sky is black and most mysterious. They had ordered the guards away, their lifts had whirled, they rose, and far above the Earth there were ruby tongues of jets and the volcanic roar of power.

The airport lay desolate.

. . . In his ship, Herb could not sleep. He kept reviewing the time he had spent alone with Norma. It was difficult to remember clearly. What few things he could remember would, he was afraid, be lost forever in the jungle of confusion that was his mind unless he went over them again and again and planted them firmly and deeply into his being.

What an alien and lovely name, Norma. Something about her was so quiet and reassuring. He wanted to bury his head against her

breasts and whisper, "I wish I could save your planet, but I can't." He had wanted to confess to her, but he could not. If she had discovered . . . But now, in the darkness, on the narrow cot, he thought about her and buried his head against her soft breasts, and he smelled the cool darkness of the perfume, and he spoke to her and told her the truth, and she understood his hurt and knew the necessity and forgave him . . .

\* \* \*

The trouble began one week after the take off. The Oligarch read well the signals of its arrival, but he did nothing. A scene would be bad for the crew's morale. He thought it would be a tonic to his own. It would prove the validity of his conclusion: that the indoctrinated starman called Leslie would crack up on the seventh day.

It happened, as he imagined it would, shortly after Leslie had filled out his dream form.

It was in the messhall.

Without warning Leslie kicked over his chair. His face twisted. His hands whitened at the knuckles. There was an insane expression in his eyes. He looked slowly around the table.

With his first movement there came silence; it was instantaneous; it was as though the clock had stopped in a parlor of corpses. 'No

one moved.

He screamed a great, searing curse. The word was English.

The crew waited. No one breathed.

Leslie began to break things with mounting fury. He shattered his plate by slamming it savagely to the table. He threw his cup against the far wall.

They waited. Many of them cried inward encouragement to insanity.

"Lies!" he screamed in English. "Lies! *There is no Universe!*"

He fell to his hands and knees and growled and snapped like an animal.

The Oligarch felt his detachment shatter. Hurriedly he left his table and went to Leslie and killed him.

Breathing with difficulty, he arose and addressed the crew. "This is what happens to a man who lies on his dream form." They rustled uneasily. "Go back to your meal."

One by one they resumed eating. Slowly conversation grew and expanded from whispers to abnormal loudness and then back to whispers again. The ubiquitous microphones peered up eagerly from the tables, and the hungry record tapes consumed the sounds.

The food lodged in Herb's throat. There seemed no moisture any-

where in his body. He fought down an irrational impulse to get to his own feet and scream forever.

Once again at his private table, the Oligarch was amazed to find that the complete justification of his own logic left him feeling empty and unsatisfied and disappointed. The matter was behind him. In the future could he expect equal success? Insatiable doubt grew.

He stood up. The compulsion to wash his hands was irresistible. He left the mess hall hurriedly.

As he watched the cool cleanliness of the water flow over his hands, he felt at peace.

He was a god, playing with men, knowing them as they would never know themselves, seeing into their inmost souls, moving them to his will.

He was tempted to greater accomplishment. Could he—could he—? Unsure of himself, he was doomed to seek endless reassurance.

Herb. Now Herb. There was a dangerous man. At least, he would become one, in another three days. It would be like playing with fire to play with Herb. It would be exciting, too.

He dried his hands. His heart was beating faster.

Herb would soon begin to doubt.

William was already doubting. He should have done something about them both before now. About Leslie before now . . .

I will see that Herb . . . that Herb . . . what?

His mouth was dry. Excitement swelled and made his breath catch. His throat ached.

He would help William to doubt. None of them must return to Brionimar.

It was intensely rewarding to play God, if you could get your hands clean.

The Oligarch rang the buzzer. He would leave the mike tapes and the dream forms until this afternoon.

He would interview William now.

He was washing his hands when William entered.

AFTER the interview, William came in and sat on Herb's cot.

In recent days, their common knowledge had drawn them together; before, they had scarcely spoken. Whenever they talked now, they used English, partly as a recognition of their kindred uniqueness, partly as a futile subconscious attempt to outwit the spy tapes.

"It's a ridiculous planet, Herb said.

"Yes, a ridiculous planet," William agreed.

"Freedom," Herb said. "That is nonsense."

"Equality," William said. "Equality. They are down right silly."

"You wouldn't think a place like that could exist, a silly place like that, where a man can actually say whatever silly idea pops into his mind."

"Yes," William said. "They should be destroyed—even if it wasn't necessary, they should be destroyed."

Herb was silent for a moment. The microphones listened. Then: "Imagine how awful it would be to live down there, with no one to do your thinking for you."

"The natural leaders aren't even recognized. You can't tell an Oligarch from a Subject."

"I'd never like to live in a place like that," Herb said. *I dreamed of it*, he wanted to say, *and I dreamed that Brionimar had been changed into Earth, and there was no Oligarchy, and a man was free.* "It's like a nightmare," he said.

They fell silent.

William wanted to say: *If only we could take that dream back with us, if only our people could see.*

"Yes," Herb said suddenly. "God, yes, yes."

"Eh?"

"... nothing."

"He called me in today," Wil-

liam said.

"Oh?"

"We talked."

"What did you talk about?"

"Not much . . . I don't see what he was trying to get at." William stood up. He looked at the microphone. He felt courage grow in him. "I've been . . . thinking . . ."

Herb nodded. He dared not speak.

"You know what I mean?"

Herb nodded.

"We'll talk later."

**A**FTER the fourth daily meal, William came once more. He took Herb's arm and gestured with his head that Herb should follow. Herb arose; his heart stood wildly beating in the cage of his chest; his blood ran with conspiracy and excitement.

They walked down the corridor until they were in a section free of microphones. It was, although they did not know it, intentionally unwired. It provided the crew a harmless escape valve for their emotions. It was not (as any Oligarch could have told you) necessary to watch a Subject all the time. Most of the spy tapes, as a matter of fact, were never even inspected.

William was sweating. Herb could not account for the inten-

sity of emotional strain he seemed to be under. Herb imagined they would talk briefly—and plan vaguely—about ways to carry some of the idea and the feel of freedom back to Brionimar. They would bear a message of hope, they would tell that Earth had not been destroyed in vain, that a civilization could function in freedom without chaos. And perhaps, someday, not in their time, but someday . . .

"It's not perfect," Herb said. "We dream of perfection, do you understand, but even Earth is not perfect. I think we ought to remember that. I can feel it, I can tell it. I . . . We want to take that back with us, too."

William was scarcely listening. His muscles were tense and crawling with danger. He had to speak, to confide, to know that he was not alone. To have Herb help him. Herb, too, must know.

"Listen," he hissed. "You know what I meant when I said I've been thinking?"

"Yes," Herb said "So have I."

William licked his lips. His heart seemed to stop. He took a deep breath.

*"How can we stop him from blowing it up?"*

The Universe wheeled. Herb could not believe what he had heard. A Destructionist!

"He dropped some hints, he did-

n't mean to, but he did," William said. "I finally realized. You must have known longer than I have. It's all a lie. He as good as told me so."

Herb took half a step backward. His skin crawled with horror.

William, oblivious to everything but his own words, said, "We've got to stop and plan carefully. I will kill him myself, and then you get to the control room . . . We'll have to hold the crew off. They might not believe us. Not at first. That will be the big trouble . . ."

Herb continued to back away. All the training of a lifetime surged into his mind. There is scarcely a way to express the detestation a starman, properly conditioned felt toward a Destructionist. His reason was destroyed. He wanted to leap at William and tear at his face with his naked hands.

I've got to warn him! Herb thought.

He turned and ran. The Oligarch! I've got to warn him! Breath sobbed in his throat.

William watched the fleeing figure. He reached out a hand to stay him. He could not believe his own miscalculation. He stood, limp and defeated. There was no will left in him. Bleak betrayal was a heavy winged vampire.

There was no place to go.

He sat down.

It was all very logical for the first time in his life. Some where in time the Oligarchy had invented the menace as a device to gain (or to retain) power. They had saturated the people with ignorance, ridiculed thought, and eliminated freedom until the menace could not be challenged. They had established a closed and consistent system that could justify anything. And now that he had gotten outside, stepped beyond it, by denying its ultimate premise, the immensity of the fraud was mind staggering. There was no combatting it as long as one lived inside. There have, he thought, been other Earths. Nothing outside the system must be permitted to intrude.

He put his head in his arms and began to cry.

That was how they found him when they came to kill him.

**H**ERB did not watch the kill. He went straight to his cot and lay down and waited for the news to come. He heard the rustle of voices in the corridor as the hunt was being organized.

He was still trembling with disgust: a Destructionist! The very word sent a shudder through his body. To think that William, of them all, that William, would have been one seemed impossible. Still, you could never tell. A neighbor,

a friend . . . You could never tell who might be.

How could they think? What sort of creatures could they be? Herb's imagination shrank from the task. It was one thing to hate the Oligarchy, but it was quite another to favor the end of the Universe.

The rustle of voices diminished. They were after him. They would get him.

Herb thought: Perhaps with this one action I have saved the Universe. When this becomes known on Brionimar, when it is learned how I, single handed, exposed the menace, then they will . . .

*But suppose William was right?*

Never before had such a thought even fought for recognition, and now, without warning, it erupted in naked completeness. It was an electric shock.

No! he shrieked, *no!*

He was sitting erect. He was clammy with icy perspiration. His whole body was suddenly silent and listening, every muscle and nerve strained in the direction of the hunt.

He lay back.

No, he thought.

**T**HE next day the Oligarch called him in.

"I want to thank you again, Herb." He watched his words.

sink into naked flesh. "If you had not told me, I would never have suspected. But for you, he—he might have succeeded."

Herb refused to look into the Oligarch's face. I did right, he thought. I did what I had to do, what anyone would have done.

"I know it has been a shock," the Oligarch said. "You were very fond of William."

Herb's lips twisted silently.

"I want to tell you a story," the Oligarch said. "Listen, listen carefully. It is about a man called Bud and what he did."

Herb was not listening; and then suddenly he was listening. The Oligarch told the story, and when he was done, leaned forward, waiting. It was as if Herb had just heard the most important story in the world.

"His brother's head," the Oligarch whispered, "he traded his brother's head for power . . ."

There was something about the idea that reached deep into the ancient folk shadows of Herb's mind and stood as a symbol. But he did not understand about symbols: only their compulsive effects. All his rage and frustration and guilt crystallized around Bud. If he could only see Bud fall and gasp and die, he would have vindicated morality and done all that he could do in the name and cause of jus-

tice.

"You may go," the Oligarch said. "Think about what I've told you."

## CHAPTER VIII

**N**ORMA missed Herb. There was the glamor of the unknown about him and the appeal of the familiar. He was two individuals, a little boy, confused and puzzled and mute and needing her, and a man, strong and wise and belonging to a strange world she could not enter as she had entered all too easily the masculine world of Earth.

She was with Frank when Bud made his television announcement.

Bud beamed happily in the glare of uncounted millions of dollars of publicity. "At my invitation," he said, the starmen have consented to return."

Frank winced to see what he thought to be a decent cause advancing the personal fortunes of a fool, a hypocrit, and a coward.

Bud—it was a little difficult to imagine (without having heard it) how he managed it—at the high point of his speech inserted a few remarks about home, mother, and the virtues of honesty and hard work. He was, he explained, a poor but honest man, holding certain principles dear to his heart. He was at a loss to account for

the fact that he had been chosen to lead this great crusade for the starmen. "We can thank All Mighty God that they have consented to return. *They will return.* I do not believe there are enough Communists in the country today to prevent it."

Frank shuddered to think what might happen now. Suppose Bud should—God, no!—become President out of all this; suppose the people, in gratitude, or the politicians seeking a popular hero, contrived his election.

Frank felt that he might have erred in using bad means to gain good ends. For Bud, hunting subversives, socialists, liberals, and critics, could rapidly reduce the country to conformism and with native ingenuity, pervert starscience into a political weapon.

The first radio message, on Earth frequency, to the President requested that Bud be given the job of handling all negotiations. If, it said, Senator Council finds it in his heart to accept the responsibility.

Many people did not understand the last.

Bud did.

THE morning of the day the starmen returned, Norma came into Bud's office. She was practically bursting with excitement. Thoughts of what their

knowledge would contribute to Earth, the marvelous advances in medicine, in physics, in art that hovered just within reach . . .

On her way through the secretary's office, she passed a slight, nattily dressed man wearing a hat.

For a puzzled second she furrowed her brow. Then memory came. He had been investigated by the Senate Crime Committee. She bit her lip in exasperation. Why would Bud be willing to see someone like that?

"Wasn't that—?" she demanded, bursting into Bud's office.

He got up with quick awkwardness. His face was bloodless. "Ohhhhh," he sighed. "I didn't expect—Hello, Sis."

"Wasn't that—?" she began again.

"It's, it's, it's, he, he . . ." Bud indicated the box on his desk. "From an old friend."

"What's wrong? Don't you feel well, Bud?"

"Fine, fine," Bud said. "I feel fine . . . I'm very busy just now."

Norma sat down. The box rested on the desk between them. Warily Bud sank into his chair. She saw his face framed above the box, almost as if the head were hanging suspended and bodiless, and she felt an unaccountable tremor of superstitious fear.

"You poor dear," she said.

"You've been worrying so much about the starmen . . . You're losing weight. Have Frank give you a checkup, Bud; you ought to take things easier."

" . . . I will. I've been intending to . . . I'll have him look me over. Where is he; do you know where he is?"

"He went out last night. I expect him back any time."

He stood up. He was calmer now. He rested one hand on the box. "Yes, I wouldn't worry. He'll show up. I am tired, terribly tired. You saw the Secret Service men out there? They're out to kill me, Norma! Senator Stilson is hiring them!"

Norma started to protest.

"I tell you, they are. If the Secret Service weren't out there to protect me, I'd be dead right now. But God has given me a job to do. I can't let them kill me until I have done His will."

"Bud, you're just overworked. Nobody's trying to do a thing like that. Frank says it's just publicity, and I thought . . ."

"Ahhhhh," Bud said darkly. "Would the President have assigned me a body guard if it weren't true? *Would he?* There are extremists in this country—Communists and Socialists—who stop at nothing to prevent the starmen from coming back. Even Frank

. . . "

Norma's face grew a shade paler. "But he's the one . . ."

"You can never tell! But I'll tell you this. I pray every night, Sis. I get down on my knees, and I pray that God will let me live long enough." Bud's mind suddenly flashed back to his childhood, and he remembered praying that God would let him assassinate Stalin. God needed only to arm him and transport him to the Kremlin. He could have done the rest. He shook his head darkly again. "You don't understand the dangers." He felt courageous. It took guts to face the Communist menace.

She wanted to run. She clenched her fists. This is Bud, your brother, she thought. He's just upset. "I just wanted to see you for a moment," she said. "It wasn't about anything important."

Bud rubbed his hand caressingly over the box. "Yes?"

"I'll let you get back to work."

She stood up and started for the door.

"Don't worry about Frank!" Bud said sharply. "He's all right. Nothing's happened to him."

Norma was gone.

Bud began to cry, and looking at the box, he whispered, "It's all your fault. You made me do it. You did, *you made me!*"

## CHAPTER IX

HERB knew, even before the spider ships touched ground, that he was going to murder Bud.

The ships were motionless. Slowly suspense mounted. At last one ship opened its port. The landing ladder spun away.

Down came the Oligarch, alone, dressed simply in a solid color double breasted suit. A businessman's suit. There was something reassuring and normal about him. There was initial silence, and then the cheer rose and thundered.

He went directly to the platform. President Wilkerson advanced to meet him. Their hands joined, and a pleasantry passed unheard beneath the cheering. The Oligarch surveyed the welcoming party of Congressmen, foreign diplomats, and government officials. He saw Bud. He crossed to him.

The cheer became deafening.

They exchanged a few whispered words. Lip readers might have caught the question and the assent. Then, smiling, they turned to the public. Nodding, waving, Bud (visibly upset about something) tried to give the impression of recognizing each face individually. The Oligarch bowed his head modestly.

Herb watched from the port of the spider ship. He clenched his

fists angrily. If only he had a weapon of some sort.

The President spoke briefly.

Then, as the Oligarch moved toward the speaker's platform, Herb dropped swiftly down the ladder. His feet touched the ground.

The Oligarch watched from the corner of his eye. Herb moved toward the crowd. The crowd leaned forward to catch the Oligarch's every word.

And he was cleansed. He was free of all responsibility: it was now between Herb and Bud. If Herb succeeded . . .

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began.

They were hushed.

"Thank you for your reception. I stand today before . . ." His voice translated into a billion volts, blanketed the world with supersonic vibrations made audible by millions of loudspeakers.

He needed pay no attention to his speech. His mind was floating free, and his body was light and youthful. There were only a few more things to be done, and then his role would be finished.

"On this momentous occasion," the Oligarch continued.

Herb was free of the worst of the crowd. He resisted an impulse to run. He, too, was wearing a businessman's suit. It was the

same one he had worn for the hearings. In it, he was indistinguishable from an Earthman. He pulled his hat lower over his face and pushed his way outward. Faces turned, eyes alerted with curiosity, shoulders shrugged, faces turned away. Herb did not know that Norma had seen him and was now trying to fight her way free of humanity to follow him.

The Oligarch continued his speech. His grim and gloomy reflections vanished. He peered out at the Earth faces with genuine benevolence. *It's not in my hands any longer*, he wanted to tell them. *One of your Senators will make the ultimate decision, unless one of my starmen kills him first.*

And then inwardly he chuckled. Or perhaps, he could have said, *my starman will experience some incident, perhaps even a trivial one, that will awaken him to the fact that the universe is not in danger. In which event, he will not be able to convince you of the danger to Earth. For in due time, I will announce his escape as a dangerous lunatic.*

**H**ERB'S feet moved rhythmically against the sidewalk. For one moment, there was a sense of freedom and impending loss. No more dream forms, his feet seemed to echo.

No  
more  
dream  
forms . . .

And coloring it, the perception of the world around him, the bright air, the hot sun, the colors and the gentle wind. Perhaps the colors were most startling, for on Brionimar there was universal drabness that approached decay. The Oligarchy struck out at all frivolity, sensing danger to itself in all sensuous pleasure.

And then the beauty, the sheer, heart-stopping beauty of freedom and color burst on him; his conditioning collapsed. Earth knowledge surged across his memories.

It must not die, he thought, forgetting hatred in beauty. It must not, because there is so much that is good, that is noble, that is sad and mighty . . .

"Hello," Norma said breathlessly.

He whirled. For an instant he was terrified. He saw that she was alone.

He relaxed. Warmth grew within him. "Hello." Until now, it had not occurred to him that he might have been followed.

"Why did you—?"

A radio was blaring somewhere, and as he looked at her, both of them half laughing, they both heard the announcement that

would be headlined shortly in the papers, as:

**RENEGADE STAR MAN ESCAPES SHIP. FEAR INSANE, SAYS GEORGE.**

**EARTH AUTHORITIES ALERTED.** (Full description of escapee on page two.)

**THIS MAN IS ARMED AND DANGEROUS.**

## CHAPTER X

HERB hunched his shoulders as if to ward off a suspected blow. Norma's eyes mirrored fright and uncertainty, and she moved half a step from him.

Grasping her arm at the elbow, he said, "We have to get off the streets."

Norma wanted to twist away from him and run.

"You've got to help me hide!" The pressure seemed threatening.

"Let me go!"

He dropped his hand instantly. "You've got to help me."

From the expression on his face, she knew that she had nothing to fear. She felt ashamed of herself.

"We can go to my hotel," she said.

Once in the hotel, Herb's eyes darted around the four walls of the living room.

"There are no microphones," Norma said.

They stood just inside the door. Norma turned and walked decisively to the divan. She sat down. "I think you'd better explain."

"I . . . I need some money," Herb said. "There's something I have to get."

"What is it?"

"I . . . Please trust me, *please*," he said.

She hesitated; then: "How much do you need?"

"A . . . hundred dollars. Could you let me have—loan me—that much?"

Norma knew he was not insane; there was something here that she did not understand, but it was not insanity. Her emotions went out to him. She saw the present situation only in personal terms, their own relationship. She saw no wider implications. Intuition, she would have called it. Decisively, she phoned for the bellboy and when he came, gave him a check for the management to cash.

While they were waiting for the money, she said, "Won't you tell me—?"

"I can't. I can't. I wish I could. Please, if you'll—" he hesitated, and then, with sickness and loathing, said, "trust me . . ."

The money came.

"I'll try to pay you back; make it up to you some way . . ."

"That's all right. Where are you

going? What are you going to buy?"

Perhaps it was the desire to shock her, to destroy her faith in him, perhaps and more probably, it was the need to confess (and hope for absolution) that he said: "I want to buy a gun."

"Why do you want a gun?"

Herb, still standing, tried to memorize her face. He was acutely aware of his isolation. He wanted to go to her side, to talk rapidly, to reveal the cruel and horrible compulsion that was driving him—and most of all, to enlist her aid and her understanding. He needed to know that one single individual in the whole Universe could appreciate his attempt to meet his own standard of truth and morality.

"Tell me. Maybe Bud will be able to help you out of your trouble . . . He's my brother . . ."

The complexity of emotions that burst upon him was almost impossible to understand. He had thought of her—if he had actually thought of the connection at all—as an employee of Bud's, perhaps, but no more than that. He asked incredulously: "Frank was your brother?"

"You mean . . . is my brother?"

"Yes . . . I, yes, of course."

"What did you mean: was my brother?" Uneasiness settled deep inside her. "Has something hap-

pened to him?"

"No. No. It was a grammatical error." Herb thought the sentence too stiff for credence. But she seemed reassured.

"I'll get Bud to help you. And Frank, too. Perhaps the three of us can get you out of any trouble you're in. I'm sure the star-men will be fair. If it's something you've done . . ."

"No! Don't talk to Bud! Don't tell him you've seen me. You mustn't!"

"Herb, you're being silly." She stood up. "You make it sound like I've got something to be afraid of from my own brother."

Herb bit his lips in anguish and ran from the room.

Norma heard his feet on the carpet, running, running . . .

The empty room became a thing of terror. She was entangled in something beyond her understanding, and the world seemed less secure than at any time since her parents had died. Should she go after Herb, or . . .?

She started toward the telephone, stopped, turned away—and then turned back.

She got the switchboard.

"Get me Senator Council's office . . . Hello, oh, hello, John. Norma. Is Bud in yet? Oh, still. Have him call me as soon as he—oh. All right. I'll be over in

an hour then. And John: have you heard anything from Frank? I'm beginning to get worried about him. He isn't in yet . . . ”

She hung up slowly, wondering if she had done the proper thing.

**S**HE was early for the appointment with Bud, and she was waiting in the outer office when he came in. His two guards nodded recognition and Bud said, “What is it, Norma?” His tone was irritable, and she wanted to cry.

“Please, may I talk to you a minute?”

Bud shifted his weight nervously.

“Please, Bud!”

“Come on. I haven’t got all day.” Letting her enter the main office before him, he said. “What’s it about this time?”

He drew the door to his private office closed after them, and went to his desk where he picked up a letter and pretended to read it. “Well? Well?”

“I’ve talked to Herb.”

Bud’s face sagged. The letter began to tremble ever so slightly. Norma did not notice. He did not look up. How much did Herb know? About Frank? Did he know? “Yes?”

He felt weakness dissolve his arm muscles and dissolve the muscles of his thighs and calves. He

was afraid that he was about to suffer a heart attack. He had difficulty breathing. “What—what did he have to say?”

“He wanted me to buy a gun for him.”

“What for? What for? What did he want a gun for?”

Norma twisted her hands nervously. “I don’t know. He wouldn’t say. He’s in trouble. I thought maybe we could help him.”

“He didn’t say anything else?” Bud demanded sharply, feeling the fear fade. “He didn’t tell you, he didn’t say anything else?”

“No, just that he needed a gun —”

“Where is he now?”

“I don’t know.”

“You don’t know? You don’t know? He’s trying to get a gun, and you don’t know where he is?”

“I—I—”

“No telling what kind of a crazy fool idea he’s got. No telling what kind of lies he’d tell about me!”

“He’s in trouble, Bud. We ought to—”

“You listen to me! You do what I say! Don’t pay any attention to anything he says. If you see him again, you call me!”

“I think I’d better talk to Frank about it, Bud. Have you seen him?”

Bud was on his feet and around the desk. He grabbed her shoul-

ders and began to shake her. Her face drained of color. His nostrils flared white.

"Bud! Bud! What's got into you?"

"Frank's all right!" Bud cried. "Now, get out, get out, GET OUT!" He shoved her away from him. "Get out," he sobbed.

Half dazed, she backed away, opened the door, and disappeared.

Trembling, Bud sank into his chair. It was a long time before his breathing returned to normal. He counted his pulse with intent concentration, feeling it flutter like a wounded bird beneath his finger tips.

## CHAPTER XI

HERB had no real hope of eluding capture. After he fled from Norma, he pulled his hat low over his face and hurried down the street. At the first hotel, he entered and registered and was shown his room.

He fell on the bed; the room was fuzzy and dull. He wanted nothing more than to sleep. His mind was such a searing agony of doubt that he had to escape from it. He curled up warmly and nestled against the softness of the mattress and closed his eyes, trying to drive all thought from him, and he slept.  
...

When he awoke, the room was heavy with darkness and silence, and he lay still, trying to feel the vibration of the ship's motors. The memory of a formless dream clung to his mind, and he tried to clarify it for the dream form.

Awareness of his location came. He relaxed, wanted to sleep again, thought: no more dream forms, no more . . . Other memories stirred and returned, and he was uneasily awake. He opened his eyes, growing tense.

He held his breath. The dark around him concealed unknown dangers. He was still fully clothed, and he stood up. He found the light switch.

With the bright flame of electricity he became aware of how heavy his head was; how incoherent his thoughts were; and there was a sour taste in his mouth. He blinked his eyes. The room was reassuringly normal.

He went back to bed and lay down. His thoughts whirled. Beyond thought there was a great, tugging emptiness in his stomach, a sense of despair that seemed to dwell in every tiny muscle and radiate outward from every tiny blood vessel. The light made him naked, and he could not face his own nakedness.

He turned out the light and returned to the bed. The dark

was protective and reassuring now, and he closed his eyes.

Bit by bit the sense of unreality fled.

Dawn came.

**T**HE TV set sat squatly on the table across the room. Morning sunshine fell brightly through the Venetian blinds. Herb turned on the set to discover the latest news of his pursuit.

The screen lighted and on its surface formed the deadly trinity of the starships. It was a long shot from a sound truck, and the camera panned an expanse of desert beyond to focus briefly on the Arizona sunrise.

An announcer was commenting on the riot of color that was quite obvious to the viewer: the flame of dawn in the sky and the blood red of the prairie flowers that covered the desert.

Herb watched and listened.

The starships were in place. Their cutting beams lanced out, there were puffs of destruction, and the tubings struck into the ground.

The camera near one of the ships observed the operation intently. A scientist was commenting on the technology of the star-men. "The information inherent in one of these ships alone," he said (characteristically underesti-

mating the pace of advancement), "would be enough to thrust Earth a hundred years—in terms of scientific knowledge—into the future."

A shudder spun through Herb's body. He paced the room restlessly. Somewhere at a distance a clock struck the hour. Outside the open window, English sparrows chattered shrill, imperative commands.

Herb was hungry. He phoned the desk and ordered breakfast. He was in the bath room when the bellboy arrived; he called, "The money's on the dresser." For fear of being recognized, he remained hidden until the bellboy left.

He came out. The tray was on the night table. Eating, he continued to watch the progress of the starships.

The voice of the Oligarch now came from the TV. He fabricated plausible details about what they were discovering of Earth's early physical history.

Sweaty faces advanced and receded from the cameras. The three tubes continued into the Earth, going deeper by the minute.

A sense of urgency and desperation filled Herb. He must hurry to kill Bud. By noon the desert operation would be completed. Earth would be a mined planet. Destruction could then be ac-

complished by the flick of a switch.

He looked at his face in the mirror. Black stubble pricked his skin in a thousand places, and he ran his hand across his cheek. He shrugged and found his hat.

Until sunset, he told himself, he would have until sunset to accomplish his self-imposed assignment.

Bud, he thought (and revulsion mounted in him), is her brother, and she, his sister; and Frank, Frank is dead and forgotten and hidden somewhere, as soon will be now the Earth and all its beauty.

He was in the street. The sunshine was bright. He walked.

A gun, he thought, for a hand that is hungry for—and he thought: To cup the hand behind Norma's head, and stroke her hair, and look deeply into her eyes. He looked at his hands; strange, hungry hands, he thought. He felt them tighten against the metallic iciness of a gun . . .

"You can't," the man behind the counter said, "buy a pistol without a permit. You'll have to get a police permit before I can sell you a gun." His eyes shifted uneasily from Herb's face, and Herb thanked the man and started back toward the sunshine.

"Wait a minute!" the man said. The harsh command froze Herb.

He turned. He found himself looking into reward-hungry eyes. The hand below them held an automatic. The hand was trembling with greed.

"You're that starman," the proprietor said.

Herb caught his breath. He jerked to his left and spun around. He ran.

The harsh roar of the automatic burst behind him. The proprietor had taken flight for an admission of identity; but perhaps latent uncertainty had carried the bullet high. It smashed into the window pane above Herb's head, and glass fragments erupted upon the pavement.

"Stop him! Stop him!" cried the proprietor as Herb fled.

The sunlight was bright. Herb bolted across an intersection, narrowly missed being run down by a car, dodged around a heavy truck and ran to the left.

There was no more shooting. There was a hub-hub behind him. A policeman's whistle sounded.

Herb jerked around another corner. There was the sound of pursuit.

He ran a block, doubled back, entered a department store, lost himself in the crowd, took the elevator up to the third floor.

He tried to look interested in

the merchandise. Each second cost him an extra heart beat. He left a counter and went to the stairs. He became inconspicuously preoccupied with distant thoughts. He was once more on the ground floor. He left the building by the opposite entrance.

He hailed a taxi. His heart beat desperately.

Once settled in the rear seat, he felt almost secure. The worst was over. He told the driver, "Down town."

After a dozen blocks, he got out. When the cab was gone, he walked back the way he had come. He found a hotel, registered, and was shown his room.

He stood at the window. A police car cruised by. For a moment, he was afraid it would stop.

*I must get a gun*, he thought. Time seemed to be falling swiftly in the bright air.

*I must, I must.*

He went to the television set and switched it on.

The starships were still occupying the screen. The sun was slanting its rays across the desert.

An announcer spoke in a dryly excited voice.

Herb sat down, and when at length one starship lumbered into the center of the triangle and its beam struck out, weariness and futility possessed him. They were planting the atomic seed. With-

in an hour there would be no hope of reprieve. There was none now; and yet it seemed, doom was not irreversible until this last act was accomplished and the seed in place.

Herb spun the selector. He did not want to witness the climactic moment.

What was the name of Norma's hotel?

He remembered.

He went to the telephone . . .

When Norma arrived in answer to the call, she found an unshaven Herb nervously pacing the floor.

"Where have you been?" she asked breathlessly.

He seated himself on the bed and wrinkled the coverlet in his hands, working with it furiously.

"They're going to blow up the world," he said.

"Who—What?"

"I helped them. It's my fault. I was a fool. I couldn't know, you see that? I couldn't *know* . . . "

Norma was ashen.

Herb stood up and crossed to her side and looked down at her. "Out in the desert, they have just finished planting the charge. That's what they came here for. They're going to blow up the world."

"The starmen?"

"Yes."

Norma was on her feet. She was too terrified to ask why. She did not question... *It was true!*

"We've got to stop them!"

"We can't, it's too late," Herb said.

"Why not, why is it?"

"It's too late."

"We've got to stop them."

"It's too late. There's nothing we can do. Listen. Get me a gun. I want to—"

He loomed wild-eyed above her. She didn't understand what he intended to do: only that some impossible fury was driving him. "You've got to help me stop them. There must be some way."

"Get me a gun! Get me a gun!" Every atom of his being cried out to her: he had to have the gun. His thoughts were warped and twisted. With the gun everything would be clear in his mind. Everything would follow step by step. The gun could spout a great, purifying flame.

He was alone in the room. He looked down. She had dropped her purse, and it had spilled open. He walked to the gun that had fallen from it.

\* \* \*

Norma ran, wild and terrified. To whom could she turn?

Frank! Where was he?

Frank . . .

Bud?

No. No, not Bud. He—

There was no one else. Bud. Her breath was fire. He would have to do something. Bud.

She hailed a cab.

"Bud!" she called as she opened the car door. "The Senate Office Building! Hurry!" Bud, she sobbed under her breath. He can do something to stop it.

\* \* \*

Herb examined the gun carefully. He weighed it in his hand. It would do nicely. He pocketed it.

He would need only an instant. A taxi from here to the Senator's office. A trip in the elevator. Perhaps a slight wait: and then Senator Council framed in the doorway. He had—how long? Several hours, he told himself.

He touched the gun again. No hurry. No real hurry.

Several hours.

**N**orma was hysterical when she burst into Bud's office. One of Bud's hands darted for the drawer where he had taken to keeping an automatic. The hand stopped.

Norma's lips were trembling uncontrollably. "Bud!" she gasped. "*Bud, they're planning to blow up the world!*"

"What are you talking about?" he demanded angrily. "What do

you mean?"

"The starmen! I saw Herb. He told me. I had to come to you, Bud. You've got to make them stop it!"

"Nonsense," Bud said. "You're out of your mind. You're crazy." He surged to his feet. "Where is Herb? I told you to come see me if you found him. Where is he?"

"It's true!" Norma cried. "I know it's true! They've been lying to us. They spy on each other. They have hidden microphones everywhere. They want to destroy the world, Bud! Oh, please, please, please, you've got to believe me . . ."

Bud came toward her. She was insane, of course. It was astonishing how many people were insane. Sometimes Bud thought he was the only sane person left. "Now, now, you just tell me where Herb is, and I'll go have a nice long talk with him." He pocketed the automatic.

*"You don't believe me."*

"Oh, I do. Dear, I do, of course, I do. They're going to blow up the world . . . I'd like to see Herb and talk it over with him." He made soothing motions with his hands.

Bud's face, round and smiling and vacant, peered down. She wanted to throw something at it. She wanted to launch herself upon

him and shake him and make him listen to her. He was a monolithic caricature of stupidity. She had to force herself into his mind and make him *see*.

Bud came no closer to her. "Now, now, everything's going to be all right," he said. "Now, now, brother's little sister is . . ." He took a half step backward.

She was able to see him for the first time as Frank saw him. A little sense of horror was born and began to grow. She stared at him with slowly vanishing disbelief. How could someone like this be her brother? He was some cold, unfeeling, insensitive thing, wrapped up in a world that embraced no one but himself.

"What have you done to Frank?" she demanded. "Bud, *what have you done to my brother?*"

Bud half snarled.

And the Oligarch stepped out of the little room to the left. "I think it's about time I take over."

Norma felt her heart pulse and stop cold. Ice filled the air.

Bud said, staring at her with fascination, "She's going crazy, George."

Norma turned to the Oligarch. "What did you make him do to Frank?"

"Not here," Bud said softly. "Don't kill her yet. She knows

where Herb is."

Norma wanted to scream. She only half opened her mouth when the Oligarch's hand slapped sharply against her neck. Her knees buckled and she dropped unconscious to the heavy carpet.

"She knows where Herb is," Bud said again. "We've got to find him before he tells someone—tells someone else about Frank."

"She was telling the truth," the Oligarch said. "We are going to blow up the world. That's what I came back to Washington to tell you."

HERB arrived at the new Senate Office Building. He paid his fare and dismissed the cab. No one noticed him as he entered the lobby. He took the elevator to Senator Council's office. He was taking his time; he had several hours.

The secretary, John, was behind his desk. The reception room was empty. Herb felt his stomach muscles tighten, and his hands clenched the pocketed gun tightly and grew damp.

"Yes?"

"I want to see the Senator."

"What is the nature of your business?"

"I want to talk about, about some private matters. I can wait until he can see me." Herb felt

the gun, heavy and reassuring.

"The Senator isn't in right now. Perhaps I can help you?"

"No," Herb said sharply. "My business is with him. It's just between the two of us."

"He just left with his sister and George, the starman."

Herb bent forward intently. Time telescoped. An hour was no longer a practical infinity. "Where did they go?"

"I don't know, sir."

To the spider ship, Herb thought. They came back to Washington. They came back—to give Bud his reward for betrayal . . .

Herb was at the door. He almost tore it from the hinges when he jerked it open.

John picked up his telephone and placed a call to the C.I.D. "The starman, Herb," he said, "has just left Senator Council's office. You can pick him up outside. If you hurry."

BUD dismissed his bodyguard, and he and George supported Norma between them as they left the building by private elevator and subway to the garage. Bud's face was grey, his lips bloodless.

The Oligarch had presented him with a choice. Tomorrow morning, some high government official would receive in the mail Frank's

head, along with Bud's signed confession. If Bud did not, before then, speak the key words that would blow up the planet. Bud, in the first stunned instant, cried: "Take me with you!" But even as he spoke, he knew that he was doomed. Knowledge did not prevent appeal, but it helped develop resignation. Bud thrust out with entreaties and debased himself with cowardly promises, and seeing them fail, tried threats which failed equally. His mind splintered into a thousand shards and reality became abstracted fragments of himself: the world ceased then to exist for him, and he lived in a phantom land, and his ego seized upon icebergs that drifted across the chill sea of thought.

He became noble.

Norma came to consciousness as the car, driven inexpertly by the Senator, rolled toward the airport. Early afternoon sunlight slanted down across the Capitol.

She lay very quiet in the back seat, listening to the hiss of the tires. Her neck was swollen and throbbing. *Don't kill her yet*, her own brother had said, and then, out of the silence of the car, came his own voice again, contradicting what had gone before.

"Dearer to me than all gold," Bud said. "Child of my beloved mother."

"We will take her with us," the starman answered soothingly, reassuringly.

"She's all that's left," Bud said.

Norma lay quiet, unmoving, not daring to open her eyes.

"You can't know what she means to me," Bud said. "You must tell her that. You must promise to tell her."

"I will do it. I promise you."

Bud said intently, "You must promise, I must know."

"I promise."

"Nothing will happen to her? She's all I have left. All. Child of my beloved mother."

Tension accumulated between Bud and the starman. Norma realized that her brother was no longer sane.

The car slowed and stopped. Still Norma did not move. She was too terrified. They came to her door and opened it.

George pulled her roughly from the seat. She moaned but she did not open her eyes. His hard muscles against her were deadly and threatening, and her knees were so weak that, had she wanted to, she could not have supported herself.

She heard a starman's feet on the steel ladder that descended from the spider ship. She felt herself scooped up and dropped over his shoulder. In the background

she heard her brother's voice, "Child of . . ." The agony of the voice was almost unendurable. "You must tell her what I did to save her."

And she was jolted harshly upon the starman's shoulder as he swung her up the ladder.

George's feet clanged behind her on the steel, and she heard the sharp, laboring hiss of the breath of the man carrying her.

They were at the port. They entered, and the starman dropped her roughly to the floor, and George clanged the door.

"You attended to the other ships?" George asked in the alien tongue of Brionimar.

"Yes," the starman said. "They will both explode shortly after takeoff."

"The others are all aboard? We are the only ones on this one?"

"Yes."

"Good. I will remember this. You have done a good day's work. You follow instructions well. I won't forget."

"Thank you."

"Watch the girl. I'll give the signal to leave."

"What do we do with her?"

"Dump her out as soon as we hit open space."

George's feet went forward. It was over, he was done. The issue lay between Bud and himself and

between Bud and Herb, an exciting and dangerous situation that held, in its solution, the Oligarch's (and the Oligarchy's) fate: the fate of two worlds. The stakes were high. The Oligarch, thinking how free he was of the final responsibility, went first to wash the Earth germs from his contaminated hands.

Norma had not understood the conversation that muttered above her. But her terror was replaced by a sense of desperation. She moaned and opened her eyes.

The starman, looking down at her with a cold, impersonal gaze, grunted something unintelligible.

Norma struggled to her feet. He made no move to prevent or assist her. She steadied herself against the wall. Near her hand, in a clip holder, was a short, steel fire extinguishing rod. When the starman drew back his hand to hit her, she cringed away. Instinctively she found the rod and jerked it loose. Before she was aware of the action with her conscious mind, the starman sank to the floor, and the bar clattered from her nerveless fingers.

Heart racing she turned for the door. A moment later, she was outside, clambering down the ladder.

THERE were no taxis in sight. A jeep, driven by a uniformed

messenger, drew to the curb. Herb, holding his breath, crossed to it. The driver cut the motor and got out. When he disappeared in the building across the street, Herb, slipped behind the wheel. He was a technician. He began to experiment. Recently acquired knowledge came to his aid.

After what seemed a timeless heat and an endless exposure, he had the motor running.

The C.I.D. man, who had come over on the subway from the House, stepped out into the sunshine. He surveyed the street with a practiced eye.

Herb spun the jeep away from the curb and sent it careening erratically toward the airport. The C.I.D. man (fairly confident of his identification of Herb) fired twice. Herb heard one of the bullets make an explosive pop as it passed near his ear. He hunched over the wheel and gunned the motor.

NORMA stumbled from the ladder and started to run. The spider ships loomed menacingly behind her. An army guard started forward to question her, and a jeep leaped suddenly into sight from around the corner of the Administration Building. A heart beat later the jeep skewed around beside her, and Herb, his face

twisted with hate and fury cried, "Where's Bud?"

One of the spider ships behind them became airborne; and then a second leaped away.

## CHAPTER XII

GEORGE was at the controls of the ship. As his hand hovered at the firing stud, he heard someone enter behind him. He turned.

It was the starman. His hair was matted with blood. There was a wild, rebellious glint in his eyes. He snarled like an animal.

"She hit me!" he cried. And then he smashed a fist into George's face. George went down and the starman stepped across him to the control panel. His resentment had been accumulating for a life time. He had just sabotaged two ships and sent his fellow starmen to death at the orders of the Oligarch; and he must have known (even if he told himself otherwise) that he, too, would not return to Brionimar: that alone of all who had been on the surface of Earth, the Oligarch would survive. But even in this knowledge, he had still remained loyal, caught like Herb, like his whole civilization, by the spector of chaos and held helpless. But now, thinking the destruction of Earth a certainty, his

resentment rechanneled, he was able to strike—even kill, if necessary—the Oligarch in order to revenge himself upon the Earth girl who had struck him.

He snapped on the scanner and searched the airport. He saw Norma climb into the jeep. He sent the spider ship lumbering toward her. The jeep began to run.

The spider legs moved faster, and the ship, like a drunk, lurched awkwardly across the runway in pursuit. He was no pilot, but his hands jerked levers and twisted wheels and the ship moved. He sighted the underbelly heat ray.

Just as he depressed the firing lever, the ship stumbled across a transport plane that lay passively interdicting its path. The ship veered sharply to the left, throwing the sighting off target and causing the ray to turn the ground molten short of the speeding car.

The starman struggled to right his vehicle.

George found his weapon. He was numb and horrified. *If Norma were actually killed . . . if Bud found out . . . !*

George moved his weapon slowly so as not to attract the starman's attention. He was terribly, desperately frightened and unsure of himself.

The starman reached again for the firing lever. George shot

twice. The starman's hand fluttered as if in indecision, and George shot again. The starman fell backwards, and the ship shuddered to a stop.

George rolled to his feet. If Norma were not already dead, he must recapture her.

**T**H E C.I.D. man arrived in time to see the fantastic sight of a red and silver, tri-legged Leviathan from space stumbling after a surplus jeep. He slammed his car to a halt before the army guard station and cried, "Shoot him! Shoot him!" Demonstrating, he fired wildly in the direction of the jeep. "C.I.D.!" he cried. "Shoot, damn it!"

Herb heard the sinister pop of the hand gun and, glancing out of the corner of his eye, saw the rifles aligning themselves in his direction. He huddled lower over the wheel and screamed to Norma, "Hold on!"

Norma was transfixed with terror. The huge spider ship seemed almost upon them.

Herb was going too fast for the quick turn he attempted. The steering wheel was wrenched from his hand, and the jeep, like a tripped animal, twisted and threw itself to the ground and rolled over.

At the first bone shattering crash, Norma slammed into Herb,

and his head cracked the steering wheel solidly.

Far to the west, the sky flashed dull red as the first spider ship exploded in flight. The sky flashed red again. Soldiers were running toward the wreck when the first shock wave rolled in.

In giant strides, George brought his own ship to the overturned jeep. It straddled the wreck like a defiant parent and seemed to challenge the advancing soldiers. George hurried to the port.

He slammed the door back and cried, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" The outer ladder fell away at the touch of his hand, and a second later his feet were hurrying down it.

Once on the ground, he was at the jeep in a heart beat. There was no blood, but both figures were very still. "Help me!" he cried to the arriving soldiers.

Two came forward, laid aside their guns, and together, with gentle hands, lifted Norma and then Herb free of the wreckage.

When they were stretched out on the ground, George knelt. Perspiration wetted his upper lip. He poised above Norma, seeking some sign of life, and he was aware of Herb stirring uneasily to his rear. Norma's eyelids fluttered, and a wave of relief and exultation enveloped George.

"She's all right," George said

loudly. "Make sure the newspapers carry that. The girl is all right."

"Who is she?"

"She's one of ours," the Oligarch said with nice possessiveness. Bud would know better: that was all that mattered. He would know that the girl was Norma and that the girl was safe. The delicate equation of his decision was once more in balance. "Help me get them aboard the ship."

A small crowd was gathering, and an Army major pushed his way forward. The C.I.D. man, overawed by the Oligarch's presence, and uncertain of what to do now, held back watching.

"What's this?" the major demanded. "What's this?"

George stood up. "It's our personal problem. This renegade—"

"Is he the one who escaped from you? The nutty one?"

"Yes," George said.

"What about your other two ships? They exploded. They just exploded."

Instantly the surrounding Earthmen rustled suspiciously.

"He—" George said . . . "It was sabotage. He is responsible. Terrible. Terrible. I'm stunned. We haven't any time to waste. I've got to get this girl back to our big ship out there in space for medical attention."

"We've sent for a doctor," the

major said stiffly.

"We have doctors. For God's sake, man, help me get them aboard. There's no time to stand here talking. We have advanced techniques, if I can only get there in time, that may mean the difference between life and death . . ."

The major hesitated. "All right. You two soldiers—take the girl up the ladder."

"Herb, too," the Oligarch said. "If he survives, he will be tried."

The major grunted at two more soldiers.

GEORGE followed them up the ladder. He greeted the capture of Herb with bitterness. The game was over; he had been denied the excitement of it being played out. And yet there was relief: although he had once more been thrust into a role of player, it was not of his own volition. The conspiracy of events had released him from free choice. It was not his fault that it was necessary to remove Herb prematurely from the arena. He was uncomfortably aware that the major was following him.

Inside the ship, George directed the soldiers to put their burdens in the first compartment to the left. Then he turned to the major. "Your prompt action may well have saved her life." He was tense and frightened. Now that he

was sure it would be reported that a girl had been returned to the ship and hurried to medical attention, it was of paramount importance to get the soldiers and the major out of the ship. If Norma were unexpectedly to recover and begin to talk, the major might prove difficult to handle.

The crush of danger hung upon him. An instant, in which he wished to surrender and confess, was transplanted by dedication to victory. The sense of mission returned.

"I don't think I should permit you to leave, sir," the major said politely. "I've thought it over."

"Sir?"

"In view of what happened to the other two ships. How do you know this one hasn't been sabotaged, too? In your understandable anxiousness to get this girl . . ."

"I'm sure," George said evenly. "I tell you this ship is all right."

"Well, how do you know? Obviously, you knew the other two ships were all right, too; only they weren't . . ."

The Oligarch restrained an impulse to command. "This is too important a matter to delay with explanations."

The four soldiers clustering around the major seemed ominous.

"Our doctor will be here in a moment. Immediate aid can be given the girl."

George's hands trembled with rage and maddening anxiety. "I am going to takeoff immediately. Explanations can come later when the girl has been treated. I will hold you personally responsible for any further delay." He went toward the control room.

The major started to follow.

The Oligarch whirled to face him. "You will be responsible for her death. I am going to leave. If necessary, I will take all of you with me. You will have to use force to stop me."

The major stood with his hands clenched into fists at his sides. There was silence. The fists slowly unclenched.

"I would advise you to get off the ship at once," George said. He turned once more. This time he did not look back.

A thrill of uncertainty grew within the major. He swallowed stiffly and then snapped angrily to the waiting soldiers, "All right, get the lead out! Let's go! Let's go, let's go!" He seemed to want to push them physically toward the exit.

THE Oligarch was in the control room by the time they dropped off the ladder to the ground. A flick of the switch, and the ladder retreated. The ship trembled. A savage jab, and the ship became airborne. It was too

late now for them to stop him. He had made a successful escape. He was weak with reaction. A few moments more . . .

He studied the dials. Earth fell away.

He could hurry. He only need save enough fuel for a tie in. He waited impatiently for altitude. Earth shrank. The features of her surface blurred. A cloud occluded her face completely. The air resistance lessened. Gravity weakened. He was able to pour the fuel into the space jets. He fired the first and second banks. Fuel guages descended. Acceleration pressed against him like a hand. More jets. He was in a hurry. His mission was accomplished. Within two hours he would be out of the danger area of the Earth explosion. But he was not overly worried about that. He did not expect it until an hour or so after sunrise over Washington.

He locked the ship on automatic. Time enough later to finish computing the trajectory.

He was now free to dispose of Herb and Norma.

The sense of elation increased as he left the control room. He fingered his hand weapon and smiled to himself. Less than a minute later, he stepped into the doorway of the room containing the two people, his gun raised.

## CHAPTER XIII

HERB had regained consciousness.

Herb shot, and flame leaped toward the Oligarch. The room roared with the explosion.

George jerked back, and in mid-motion, something caught him low in his chest, on the left side of his body and slapped him savagely off his feet.

Incredibly, he had been hit!

He shook his head and got one knee under him. His left side was numb. He looked down and saw blood start to color his shirt.

He got to his feet and backed along the corridor. His knees were weak. He covered the door with a trembling hand and prayed for Herb to show himself.

The ship was silent.

He had to sit down. He wanted to be sick.

Perhaps Herb had taken the other door out!

He whirled.

No movement.

He had to have a place to hide. He had to hide, and wait, and when Herb came searching for him—

He staggered back. His side began to throb dully.

The ship was very quiet.

"He's out there," Herb said, knowing that his words would carry over the hidden microphones.

"I will manage to kill him before we reach the big ship."

Norma was breathing shallowly, not yet fully recovered from the wreck. "What about Earth?"

"It's too late."

"If we could—if we could destroy the . . . that ship . . . if we could ram it: prevent it from setting off the charge . . . "

"It's too late," Herb said doggedly. But even with the words, he felt the first hesitant flicker of hope. If he could take over this ship, and with it assault the great ship in space, there capture the remote-control mechanism by which the charge would be detonated then perhaps Earth could really be saved. First kill the Oligarch. Then . . .

Norma whimpered to herself.

"You stay here," he hissed, too softly, he hoped for the microphones to pick up his voice.

Her eyes widened in protest. "Don't go. He'll . . ."

"Shhhhhh," he silenced her. Bending, he whispered, "I'll find him first. You'll be all right."

He left her. At the doorway, he looked back. She seemed crumpled and lifeless and defeated.

The Oligarch was somewhere to his left. In the corridor, waiting? Herb could not know. There was only one way to find out. He stepped from the room, gun ready to fire.

The corridor was empty.  
Where? In the control room?  
In the office? In the kitchen?  
The messhall?

Herb moved forward silently.

THE Oligarch had backed across the messhall. One hand clutched at his left side. His breathing was too loud. Herb would surely hear it.

He stood in the far doorway that opened into the short corridor leading to his office and that extended beyond his office to open into the main corridor. Herb would have to cross before its open face should he come forward. From the doorway, the Oligarch also commanded a view of the main messhall entrance, should Herb stop to inspect that room first. By ducking either in or out, he could place a protecting wall between himself and his pursurer. The Oligarch knew that Herb would come. His left side was terrifying testimony that the lifetime of conditioning had been stripped away.

It would be so easy to dart to his own office; but the unprotected space between him and it was a barrier more solid than a rock cliff. If Herb should emerge as he was making the exposed crossing, he would be a perfect target. His movements were sluggish. He had to locate Herb in order to know

in which direction safety lay. But to be safe in the office, with the door barricaded . . .

\* \* \*

Herb saw the drops of blood drying slowly along the floor of the corridor.

The Oligarch had entered the messhall. Herb approached cautiously.

Standing just outside, not exposing himself, he could see a clot of blood beyond the main door. Probably the Oligarch had hesitated there, undecided—or resting.

He held the gun more tightly. His heart beat rapidly, and his mouth was dry. But he was not afraid. There was an iciness far down inside of him.

He stepped across the threshold, and just as suddenly, leaped back.

He heard the stumble of the Oligarch's fleeing feet, heard the office door open and slam.

Herb waited, listening: a feint? No. There was no sound.

Again he stepped into the messhall. It was empty.

"Herb!" Norma called. "Herb! Are you all right?" She was running down the corridor toward him.

"Get back!" Herb called, but she came on, and then she was beside him.

"He's in the office. I'm going after him. You stay here."

"No. Leave him there. Prop

the door. Keep him in. Take the ship . . . ”

“I’m going in after him,” Herb said. “I’ve got to. It’s more than him, more than killing or getting killed. I’ve got to.”

“It’s so senseless,” she said. “If we could get control of the ship . . . ”

He shook his head. “You stay here!”

He walked across the messhall. He stepped out into the narrow corridor.

“Get away!” the Oligarch cried frantically. His voice was no longer vigorous, and it sounded pathetic and child-like through the door.

Herb, going toward it, said, “I’m coming in!” He tried the door. Locked.

He fired twice at the lock. He stepped back and kicked. The door swung inward.

The Oligarch did not fire. Herb, pressed against the wall, could not see into the room.

“I’m coming in, damn you!”

“Don’t,” the Oligarch cried weakly. “Please, don’t. Don’t now!”

Herb heard a gun clatter to the floor.

“Don’t” the Oligarch moaned. “I’ve thrown it away. I’m helpless.”

Herb balanced on the balls of his feet. Then, taking a deep

breath, he stepped into the doorway, his body framed beautifully between the two jambs. He held his gun at ready and then lowered it.

The Oligarch was slumped over his desk.

Herb heard Norma come up behind him.

“He’s dying,” she said.

Reaction set in, and Herb’s knees almost collapsed. His body was trembling and drenched with perspiration.

The Oligarch coughed.

THE Oligarch said something in his own language.

“What?” Herb asked.

“Make him tell us. How we can keep them from setting off the explosion!” Norma said.

The Oligarch wanted to talk, and he made a motion—a feeble one—to silence them both. The girl’s pathetic conviction that the explosion could be prevented infuriated the Oligarch. There was nothing she could do. The cleverness with which he had executed his mission defied time and eternity.

“It won’t be set off in the big ship,” the Oligarch said. “I had intended to leave you at the site, Herb, to trigger it personally.” He spoke English and was disappointed to see that his vision began to mist. He would have liked to

watch the girl's face. "But your later dream forms made me deny you martyrdom. I think I might have done it any way, if you hadn't left. You have the idealism. You were the one I had counted on. And after you, of course, there was only Bud."

Norma choked weakly and her knees half gave way. The sound was satisfying to the Oligarch.

"I told Bud the explosion was planted," the Oligarch said. "Then I . . . I told him . . ." He coughed again. "I told him that I had mailed his brother's head along with his confession to . . . to . . . Then I gave him a telephone number. He phones long distance, gives the number. At the bomb site, the receiver . . . lifts automatically . . . He says, 'Frank Council' . . . his brother's name . . . the key . . . The trigger falls." The Oligarch's hands scrabbled on the desk. "Don't you think he'll do it, in the knowledge of his own personal destruction? . . . Oh, he will, yes . . . And this is the final . . ." Blood dribbled from the Oligarch's mouth. "I didn't mail his brother's head . . . I lied to him. Don't you see what a beautiful . . . what a satisfying lie that was?" He laughed, coughed again, and slumped forward. And the chase ended.

And Herb, looking at death,

grabbed Norma by the arm and ran toward the control room.

. . . And back on Earth, Bud Council sat sick and trembling, his eyes fastened on the telephone beside him . . .

## CHAPTER XIV

HERB thought first of the bomb site. The chill desert night would be fresh upon it. Overhead, the pale moon would ride toward the terrible Apocalypse of dawn—if Bud waited until then to make his phone call.

In a few hours (he thought) he could bring the spider ship down upon the desert. The long dark night beyond would give him time . . .

He visualized the scene as he remembered it from TV: the single sentry shack where an Army guard protected the alien handiwork.

"I'll talk to them when we land. I'll explain about Bud. They'll find him and keep him away from the telephone. They'll tell long distance operators not to place any calls until they can find him. All I need is a few hours to convince someone that Bud, that Bud . . ."

Norma was in his arms, shaking hysterically. "He . . . he did that to *Frank*. Bud did that!"

"We've got to hurry," Herb said.

She shivered against him. Gen-

tly he disengaged himself.

"In an hour, now . . ." he said. His hand rested on the forward firing stud.

Rested and withdrew.

"What's wrong?" Norma asked.

"The fuel. I haven't got enough left to brake the ship, to turn it, and then land against Earth gravity."

"No," Norma said. "No! That can't be right!"

HERB re-sorted the information available from the dials, seeking a method to defy the dictates of inertia. Once more he weighed the remaining fuel against that necessary to brake and turn the ship, and still there was none left over to counteract Earth's gravity and the long planetfall. He projected trajectories.

"Maybe I can throw the ship in a long orbit," he said. "If I can kill the speed against the atmosphere . . ."

"Can you do it?"

Herb's hands eased fuel into the forward port jet and sparked it. "I'm tilting for the orbit."

The guage dropped alarmingly, and as momentum changed, the center of gravity shifted. The ship nosed up and fell sideways and slipped away to the right.

Norma held her breath, afraid to interrupt even with encourage-

ment.

"It's an ellipse," Herb said. "It's a long fall now, but I'm afraid to make it shorter." He set the controls.

"How long will it take?" Norma asked.

"I'll have to make half a dozen bounces. The first one won't be for nearly six hours . . . We won't be able to land until sunup."

Norma bit her lip. "But that's . . ."

"We won't have much time. We'll have to try to get to Bud ourselves."

WHEN the time came, he turned to her. "I've got to hit the atmosphere now. We'll have to strap down."

Numb with tension, she sat in one of the shock-chairs and buckled herself in. Then, in his chair before the panel, Herb adjusted the buckles and waited the few remaining minutes. "This will be the worst," he said.

The ship hit the upper gases—gases, made by speed into an iron curtain; and as the air clawed at the strange shape of the ship, and as the interior cooling system whined into overdrive, he fought against wild, erratic movements, firing precious fuel to brake and stabilize . . . And then they were free, and shooting away along a

shortened and slower ellipse.

Finally they were well into the atmosphere, but they were very high, too high to be more than a speck, so high that the sound spread too thinly to be heard on the surface.

"I'll set down outside Washington," Herb said. "Somewhere outside, where we can get away from the ship before they get there to start asking questions."

He released his blast, and the ship turned nose up. Gravity became heavier. The ship plummeted down.

"Here's the last of the jets," Herb hissed, and he eased them in, slowing the fall, slowing it . . .

Down the ship came.

The Earth expanded and a fantastically fast painter seemed to be sketching in the details of the landscape.

The sun was cut off by the horizon. A few lights sparkled in slowly waking Washington.

The jets sputtered, and the ship slipped; the jets caught, sputtered, and died.

Herb slammed on the low lift controls. The aerodynamically designed platform-like wings spun and hissed against the air. For a long moment, Herb was afraid they would not brake the fall, but the lifts caught, and the ship jerked, and Herb felt the buoyancy

through the ship and through his mind and through his body.

## CHAPTER XV

LESS than five minutes later, they were stationary. The slowing lifts purred and the landing ladder hissed down.

Herb and Norma were upon it. "About a—five hundred yards," Herb said. "Over that way: the highway. Let's go!"

Running at his side, Norma prayed desperately for a car to come soon.

They sprinted the last short distance because of growing headlights from the south. The car was coming fast, and Herb jumped into the roadway, waving his hands.

The car came on, sounding its horn hysterically. Herb waved and brakes squealed, and the car, at almost the last instant, veered away from him. The wind of its passing rustled his hair, and the horn still bleating, it slowly dwindled as the red tail lights faded into the darkness.

They waited. Five minutes passed.

"One's got to come!"

Early fire hung over the ocean from the as yet invisible sun. Dew lay on the plowed field behind them. The air was chill.

It seemed that the sun was sym-

bolic fire slowly creeping and coloring the sky, slowly spreading over the world.

"What time is it?" Herb asked.

"Here's a car! Here's a car!"

Both of them leaped into the highway, waving and jumping up and down.

A long way away, the driver set his brakes, and the car coasted slowly, passed them, and finally stopped.

They ran to it. Herb jerked open the door. "You've got to take us to Washington!" Herb said.

Norma, arriving behind him, said, "It's a matter of life and death!"

"Then get in," the man said.

Overhead a jet thundered in to locate the spider ship.

They were in the car.

"You've got to drive us to an apartment in Georgetown," Norma said.

"Lady, I've been driving all night."

"You've got to!" The urgency in her voice was nearly that of hysteria.

The driver started the car. "If it's that urgent . . ."

"It is," Herb said.

"Hurry, please, please hurry. Don't ask us to explain. Just hurry."

The driver stepped down on the gas. The car leaped ahead.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE new buildings pressed against the new sidewalks. The streets were empty except for their car and a turret-like Mobile Sweeper whose gutter broom whispered against the curb. A light here and there in a window heralded the end of sleep. A lone car crossed at an intersection ahead, moving slowly as if fatigued by a night-long vigil.

The sun seemed reluctant to plunge the world into daylight; it balanced on the horizon in indecision. The moon was high and tiny and rode the growing blueness with a ghostlike palor.

Herb, leaning forward tensely, thought: *Suppose Bud isn't there? Suppose he's somewhere else?*

"Turn left up here," Norma said. "It's only a few blocks."

The buildings anchored time to the Earth, encapsulating the past in steel and concrete. Morning shadows walked before the on-rushing future.

"Here!" Norma cried.

The car braked to a stop.

The driver watched them run wildly, and an uneasiness settled upon him. He glanced to the east. The morning was chill. The excitement their urgency had generated had not vanished with their departure. What the devil? he

thought. Whadda you suppose it's all about?

**I**N SIDE, Norma said, "Third floor. He's got guards. I'll take the elevator. You take the stairs. I'll try to get the guards' attention."

Herb nodded. He bolted for the stairway. The carpet blanketed his footfalls. He heard the elevator doors click and the cage rattle upward.

First landing.

Silence.

Second landing.

His heart was loud. His feet became delicate, and he balanced on his toes, moving toward the final encounter.

There.

Norma had the guard. There was only one. She was speaking intently. The guard faced away from Herb.

Herb was in the corridor. He moved like a sigh, and the space between him and the guard shortened.

The guard turned, and Herb sprang. He crashed into the guard before the police automatic was clear of the shiny holster. The impact of his body spun the gun away.

They were down, wrestling viciously. Herb felt his head ring. He stifled a cry. Pain nestled

in his groin. He struck out.

The guard smashed an elbow into Herb's nose. He got up and kicked Herb in the face, and Herb jerked his leg savagely. Unbalanced, he went down. Herb was upon him. Breath hissed out, and Herb struck viciously with his gun butt. Panting, he stood.

"It's locked," he said, testing the door. Norma had recovered the guard's automatic. Whitefaced she stood.

Bloody nosed, bleeding, Herb threw himself into the panel. There was a great, kettle drum boom and the panel held. Again he slammed into it. It splintered away. He fought through the shards of maple, and was halfway into the room when Bud, looking up from the telephone, fired. Herb sighed and fell to the left and his gun slipped from his hand.

## CHAPTER XVII

**B**UD, drained of color, cried "Hurry that call, operator!"

His gun was on the door when Norma filled it. "Stop, Bud!"

His eyes dulled. Conflicting emotions ran jagged edges over his face. One hand held the phone, the other the gun. Norma was afraid to fire for fear she would miss. "I'll kill you if you try to stop me!" he screamed. He could

not place the person in the doorway. And then he realized that it was the Devil cleverly disguised as his sister.

Norma stepped into the room, drawing closer. Her hand trembled violently. Bud was perspiring.

"Bud," she said. Her voice choked. "He didn't mail . . . he didn't mail the . . . package . . . the . . . the package." Tears ran down her cheeks.

"Get away! *Get away!*"

"He didn't mail it! No one need . . . you're safe . . . your secret . . . Put down the phone, Bud. Please, now. *Put down the phone!*"

Very clever nonsense, Bud thought, not believing it for a moment. What package? There was no . . . He must shoot this creature, now, before she . . .

The operator said in his ear: "Here is your number, sir."

"Put me on!"

The Devil was nearer. It was too late, he thought. Norma thought: Now, now, now.

Bud's hand whitened at the knuckles. His throat was dry. He was ready to scream the Name. He did not see Herb's hand close on the weapon nor see the muzzle elevate.

"Bud, Bud, Bud, please, please, Bud!" Norma said. The trigger

of her gun would not respond.

"Get away," Bud said. He opened his mouth. "Frank C—"

And Herb fired until the weapon was empty.

There was echoing silence, and then Bud fell.

Norma was upon the telephone, ripping it free from the wall.

Herb staggered erect. Blood covered his suit. It hurt to move. A broken collar bone, he thought. Too high for the lungs.

He found Norma weeping hysterically in his arm. The other arm hung limp, and he winced with pain as he drew her tight.

He choked and bent to her ear and said, "Yes, yes," and suddenly he bent to kiss her tear stained lips, and he wanted to brush away the hair from her face, but that arm refused to move. She trembled against him, and he whispered, "Yes."

The sunlight came in the broad windows and slanted across Bud's face, boyish and petulant still in death; the sun, moving toward noon, bathed the whole awakening world with light, and far beyond it, in space but not in time, lay other stars.

And Herb felt free. For the first time in his life. Here, on Earth . . .

It was a wonderful feeling.

THE END

# X MARKS THE ASTEROID



*By  
Ross  
Rocklynne*

**Deep in space Ralph's ancestors  
lay in suspended animation — a  
price on their heads. They left  
him a map and a problem: awaken  
them — or collect the reward! . . .**

**T**HE Unterzuyder map was out of hiding. Relayed on a grapevine that spanned the planets, the news caught on big in Marsport.

Bigger Bailes sat at a beer-bottle-colored glass desk in his underworld retreat, announcing his intent to claim the reward money that for eighty-five years had been piling up at compound interest in

the Terra-First National Bank of New York.

"Ralph Unterzuyder is here in Marsport," he stated. "Like all Unterzuyders, he's clever and he's dangerous and he's shifty. He'll travel the crookedest course you ever saw. At the moment, he's got his identity pretty well covered up under the name of Carruthers Straley. In the last three



weeks he's organized a band of settlers from Satterfield City who call themselves Titan Settlers, Ltd.

"Not that I'm fooled! I'm not saying the Unterzuyder hibernaculum is on Titan. I'm not even saying Unterzuyder has the map. But I'm willing to bet he's got a pretty good idea where the map is. I'm also willing to bet that his father died without leaving him a cent, and that he organized Titan Settlers, Ltd., just to get himself a free ride out Saturn-way. He's capable of that kind of reasoning."

Bigger Bailes smiled rosily and reached for his hat. One of his men held the door open for him.

"Right now, I'm on my way to see Carruthers Straley. Maybe he will cut in with me. If not—" he thoughtfully rubbed at the fat of his big jaw "—if not, I'll help him hang himself."

RALPH Unterzuyder, fourth generation descendant of the infamous Untrezuyders, emerged testily from the Glass & Sand Bldg. where he had just set up a law office under the name of Carruthers Straley. No sooner had he set foot to the glass sidewalk than he was aware a big, smiling man had fallen into step beside him. He backed up against the wall of the building, his eyes wide and cautious behind dark glasses.

"What do you want?" he snapped.

Bigger Bailes smiled, introduced himself. Unterzuyder looked around as if ready to make a break for it. Bailes stood in front of him. He shook his head.

"I'm not going to hurt you, Mr. Unterzuyder."

At mention of the name, Unterzuyder smiled arrogantly.

"Really, does one have no privacy? But perhaps one of your caliber is well acquainted with the advantages of using an alias!"

"There are advantages," Bigger nodded. "Your advantage lies in heading a group of settlers who don't know you're using them to help you find the asteroid where your ancestors have been sleeping for the past eighty-odd years."

Unterzuyder's cane whipped around nervously. "I know nothing about a map!"

Bigger's jowls quivered with mirth. "Seven weeks ago," he pointed out, "your father died. He told you the map was hidden in an old book called *Pertium Organum, A Key To The Enigmas Of The World*. By somebody named Ouspensky."

Unterzuyder's eyes moved desperately to the street, down which a single gyromobile moved.

"I have an appointment," he said stiffly. "Now if you will permit me to be on my way before

they turn the rain-makers on—”

“It won’t rain for ten minutes. Better let me finish—if you don’t want your precious settlers to know who you really are!

“As soon as your aunt heard about your father’s death, she put the old Unterzuyder house up for auction to pay your father’s creditors. The furniture went mostly to junk-dealers, the rest to museums. All the books, some ten thousand of them, were bought by a big New York used-book company, Frangy & Sons, Ltd.

“Half of these books, the ones whose titles all began with the letters of the alphabet up through ‘M’, were kept in their New York branch. The remainder were sent to open a book store in Marsport. By the time you got to Marsport from Earth, the book was reported already sold—to a person unknown. That’s all true, isn’t it?

“After having failed to find the map, Mr. Unterzuyder, you then sent the story to a newspaper—anonimously.”

“I did?” Unterzuyder looked arrogantly at Bailes.

“Yes.” Bigger’s eyes narrowed. “Why?”

Unterzuyder surged angrily away from the wall. “I am not interested in your questions. I have my chosen mission in life. It is not the making of money!”

He brandished his cane. “I warn

you, Mr. Bailes,” he cried, “I am a nervous man. If I am not permitted to leave—”

Bigger spread his hands, astonished. “Don’t think for a minute I’m keeping you. The only suggestion I wanted to make was that you and I could work together.”

Unterzuyder took off his glasses. There were red marks around his eyes where the glasses had taken hold. He had inherited the famous thin nose and receding chin of the Unterzuyders. His pale thin lips worked nervously.

“I work alone, Mr. Bailes,” he said haughtily. “And I work best when such as you try to set your pitiful little traps! Threaten me as you will, nothing can keep me from my purpose. And now good-day.”

Bigger’s voice was filled with disgust. “Your purpose being, of course, to find asteroid X and free your ancestors so they can go to work on the Solar System again!”

Unterzuyder glared, primly returned his glasses to his nose, and stalked off.

“Scoundrel!” he muttered, putting his hand over his heart. He gasped. It was racing. And he was sweating. Trembling. His mother, the Unterzuyder matriarch, had been quite right. He should take care of his health.

By the time he caught a one-wheeled gyromobile that came

bowling down the glass street, he was feeling much better.

"Take me to the Hotel de Mars," he told the driver. He leaned back comfortably, gloved hands resting on the head of his cane while he looked around him. A strange, glass-domed city, set in the heart of Mars' desert wastelands. A thriving city, with low buildings touching the glass roof of the dome.

The rain-maker went on, the first drops splattering down from the overhead sprinkler system. Unterzuyder cringed.

"Driver, driver!" he cried, rapping smartly with his cane. "Do you want me to catch my death?"

The driver hurriedly caused the separate halves of the glasssteel cupola to fold over the car. Unterzuyder settled back injuredly.

**A**T the registration desk of the Hotel de Mars, he asked for, and was shown to the room of, Mr. Nathaniel and Miss Fayette Beecher. The door was thrown open by a tanned blonde girl in smart gray jodphurs and slick boots.

Her face at first registered a nervousness. Then it smoothed.

"Oh!" she sang out, blue eyes widening and taking him in from head to toe. "You must be Mr. Straley." She cocked her lively face cutely to one side. "Are you?"

Unterzuyder's heart banged. He bit his lip. This was exactly the kind of girl his dead mother warned him to stay away from. Coquettish. Sexy. Treacherous, like most females. And he had lately noticed, to his dismay, that he, an Unterzuyder, was becoming far too susceptible to such unhealthy influences.

"I am Mr. Straley," he said coldly. "Carruthers Straley, founder of Titan Settlers, Ltd. Shall I come in?"

"Please do. For a moment, I lost my wits."

She's making a play for me, like all females, he thought. Discouragedly, Unterzuyder went in. He sat down on a sponge-plastic chair, resting his gloved hands on his cane and looking upon the girl sternly.

"Daddy!" she sang out. "Mr. Straley is here!"

A man with a half-bald head and a deep tan lunged into the room carrying a heavy rocket-gun. His grin was wide, his voice reedy and enthusiastic. He was happy to know Mr. Straley. He laid the gun tenderly on the floor. Unterzuyder looked at it distrustfully.

Beecher's reedy laugh sounded. "It's not cocked," he explained. "You caught me right in the middle of a clean-and-polish job. That ol' gun o' mine's been every-

where, mister. Most of the Moons of Jupiter, out on the deserts—even Africa. Yessir, our exploring expeditions have taken us into every corner of the Solar System that's available."

The girl whipped open a drawer in the bottom of a boxy chair made of crystal glassteel. "And here's *my* pet!" She reached in to pull out a long-snouted neutron gun with a triple trigger. Unterzuyder's heart banged for the third time in an hour. In the drawer was one other object: *Tertium Organum, A Key To The Enigmas Of The World.*

An old book. A musty book. The book from his beloved dead father's library. The book that held the Unterzuyder map.

His breath hissed. Beecher leaned solicitously forward. "Anything wrong, Mr. Straley?"

"Oh, no, nothing," said Unterzuyder, pain wrenching his face. "But I'm not a healthy man. My heart—"

"Oh, what a shame." Fayette leaned over him, dizzying him with her perfume. She put her warm little hand on his forehead. She held his wrist to feel his pulse. She shook her blonde curls vigorously. "Nope. No fever. The pulse *did* seem to race a little when I held your hand. Outside of that—" She surveyed him judicially. "I'll bet you're as healthy as a

Venusian peat-dog!"

"Oh, come now," protested Beecher. "If the man says he's got a galloping heart, that's what he's got. Think of the courage, the idealism, the sheer fortitude of this man, who has gathered together a group of settlers to brave the dangers of a jungle-world like Titan—a planet no one has ever attempted to colonize! I personally *hand* it to the man!"

There was a fawning admiration on his unshaven, grinning face.

Unterzuyder settled back in his chair, feeling put upon.

"I'm afraid of guns," he told Fayette petulantly. "If you'd please put it away—Besides—" He drew a clipping from his bill-fold. "--I am already convinced of your prowess as explorers."

The headlines on the clipping read:

#### EXPLORERS RETURN FROM GANYMEDE ICE TUNDRA

Father and daughter make  
unique team

"It says quite a bit about the expeditions you two have headed. Needless to say, I'm impressed! I am here, of course, to make you a proposition."

**H**E explained his purpose at some length. For several weeks he had been engaged on a project dear to his heart. He believed in the future of the human

race. He wanted to spread mankind's dominion even beyond the Moons of Jupiter. Titan had been viewed by only two men, both of whom stated it was livable. It had soil. It had vegetation. Also, it had dangerous animal life.

"That's for us!" said Fayette stoutly. She accidentally pointed the neutron gun at Unterzuyder. She was squirming around on her chair with repressed vitality. Her eyes melted on him. He wished he could get over the feeling that she was laying it on too thick. That perfume. He must not allow himself to be affected.

He cringed from the gun. She hastily put it on the floor. He wondered how accidental it might have been. Probably these cheap opportunists were perfectly capable of killing.

He would have to watch his step. They had the map, all right. The bookseller's description of Fayette had been quite correct and helpful.

Fortunately, the bookseller had been willing to accept a bribe not to give anybody else the information.

He spoke again.

"When I received your visocall, Miss Beecher, I at once felt that Titan Settlers could work with you. I seriously discussed with them the possibility of giving you and your father titular

command of the expedition."

"Uh—" said Fayette. "You've already been capitalized?"

Unterzuyder coughed delicately. "My intrepid settlers are composed of young husbands and wives and their children. I was able to sell them—that is—the magic allure of a new world was really all that was necessary to convince them that Titan is where their destiny lay. They sold all their belongings, and—ah—invested the funds with me as Treasurer of the organization."

Beecher smacked his hands together enthusiastically.

"Fine, fine! There's nothing the daughter and I like better than to push on into a new frontier. Mr. Straley, for twenty thousand credits we're bought!"

Unterzuyder sat bolt upright. "Ten thousand credits," he said severely, "is the top amount we can offer. That is final. With one thousand credits in advance!"

He whipped out a check book. He adjusted his glasses. Primly, he wrote a check and extended it with a jabbing motion, holding it for perhaps thirty seconds before Beecher's crestfallen face turned toward his daughter. Fayette was looking with intense interest at the check.

"Why not? Mr. Straley, like you, we're idealists. Money means hardly anything. I think you've

made a deal!"

Beecher stowed the check in his wallet with satisfaction. "Now we'll get busy. Of course, we'll have to have a drawing account. We'll have to discuss details, such as the number of settlers to be transported so I can buy or charter the proper type of space ship. There's the matter of building supplies to be bought—grain seeds—food—a thousand details which you can leave entirely in our hands, Mr. Straley!"

"And while we're at it, I'd like to shake your hand! It's very few people who'd endanger their own lives to further the progress of mankind!"

The experience left Unterzuyder weak. He looked appealingly at Fayette. "I wonder if a glass of water—" he said feebly.

Hurriedly she disappeared to the apartment kitchen. Unterzuyder slumped lower in the seat, breathing hard.

"Maybe," he told Beecher helplessly, "a shot of whisky would do the trick better."

"Sure thing!" Beecher went after his daughter. As soon as they were both out of the room, Unterzuyder got up and pulled open the drawer containing *Tertium Organum, A Key To The Enigmas Of The World*. Quickly he unfolded the chart in the back of the book. The map should be there.

It wasn't.

He slapped the drawer shut, sank feebly back to his seat. The Beechers were gone an inordinate-long time. He thought he heard them whispering in the kitchen. Then Beecher lunged back into the room bearing a jigger of no doubt cheap rye. Unterzuyder gulped it down and put the glass to one side.

Fayette was admiring. "For a man in poor health," she exclaimed, "you take it without a whimper—or a chaser!"

"Eh?" Unterzuyder blinked, then drew himself up stiffly. "Whiskey is the only medicine my doctor permits. And now, let's get down to the matter of the contract!"

ONE month later. Ralph Unterzuyder was furious. He stalked the darkened decks of the trembling space ship *Ares*—a slick hundred-tonner with sixty square feet of firing surface—and reflected that the Beechers were making a worse sucker out of him than he'd expected them to.

First, they were a pair of fakers. That much had been obvious from the start, with that phony newspaper write-up, all that bragging about their knowledge of fire-arms when they didn't even know enough to keep a weapon pointed toward the floor. Well,

he'd expected that much. But to discover they did not even have *basic knowledge* of how to outfit an expedition!

They had actually begun ordering *lumber* for building, until he pointed out the climate of Titan might be kinder to prefabricated glassteel sections.

They had actually paid out money for seeds, bulbs, and saplings until he showed that all farming on Titan must for the present be on an experimental or at best highly speculative basis.

Not only that, they had attempted to charter a ship twice as big as needed, one that used large quantities of chemical fuels. That ridiculous error had been amended with a smaller ship sporting atomic gas-thrust. As for the captain and crew, they had been hired by Unterzuyder himself—and, by means of the secret passage of one thousand credits from Titan Settlers' funds to Captain Foshag, the captain and crew were bought.

Unterzuyder balanced himself angrily down a companionway. As he passed a hanging ventilator, the drum-beat and skittering rhythm of a jury-rigged orchestra echoed up from the ballroom. A dance was in progress. Unterzuyder smiled sentimentally. Nothing like giving the settlers a run for their money.

Of course, he reflected dourly,

Fayette Beecher had got the best of him in the matter of using the drawing account. Unterzuyder scowled. What had got into him? Somehow, Fayette's roving blue eyes and fiery touch did their work on him. Next thing he knew, he was in duress, being dragged on the arm of that fluffy creature from one dress shop to another.

An expense account to buy swirling party dresses? — with a smidgin here and there for fancy explorers' outfits? The memory of his folly made Unterzuyder squirm.

He sighed heavily as he came to C deck. Anyway, by his own cleverness, he had a ship, he had the Beechers—who had the map!

And the hibernaculum asteroid, where his dozen infamous ancestors were sleeping away the decades under the influence of a potent, forbidden drug called somnolene, was somewhere out near Titan. Or *had been*.

That was the one thing he remembered when, as a child, his father showed him the legendary map. At least he was headed for the area where the asteroid *might be*.

And so might, he reflected glumly, that arrogant, impossible Bigger Bailes!

THE Beecher's double-state-room was on C deck. Just as he

turned an L in the corridor, he ran head-on into a gaily running figure clad in a fluffy party dress.

For a moment they struggled in an attempt to regain their balance, and when Unterzuyder came out of it he was holding Fayette Beecher tightly, and he was kissing her warm little face. She responded just as energetically. And suddenly he woke up to the horror of the role he had assumed.

He shoved her away. She stumbled backward and there was a glassy tinkling sound.

"Ooh, your glasses!" cried Fayette, making a grab for them. He grabbed, too, suddenly convinced he had gone blind. "They're broken, Ralph, honey!" she said. "You look so much better without them." She flung her arms around him again, pressing him back to the wall. Her lips drooped disappointedly.

"I—I'm fond of you," she said unhappily. "But you're so darned peculiar. You fell all over yourself kissing me. Now you're backing off. What's wrong?"

Unterzuyder was scared. It came as a shock to him that the extreme emergency of the situation had given him, by some hypnotic process, better vision than he'd ever had. In spite of the darkness of the hall, he could see that Fayette was ravishing. She could make a strong man weak. Well, he would

not give her that opportunity.

Besides, something she'd said just now, something he couldn't put his finger on, had subconsciously frightened him. What?

These treacherous Beechers!

Maybe she was using her indomitable weapon to win him over. To what?

Perhaps to cut him in on the map. X marks the spot, indeed! X was a moving asteroid. It had been moving for some eighty-odd years since the map was made. To find its present location was a problem in celestial mechanics. The map would have to be deciphered. Not only that, the original maker of the map, being an Unterzuyder, had undoubtedly confused the issue by making the job hard even for a mathematician.

Naturally, the Beechers hadn't dared take the map to anybody for deciphering. To do so, might have brought the whole criminal element in the Solar System after them. That of course, was a little thing Unterzuyder himself had arranged—when he anonymously gave the details of the story to the press.

The Beechers had been boxed in.

Now, in desperation, the Beechers probably figured that if Fayette could make Carruthers Straley fall in love with her, that he, being a lawyer, might have a devious

enough mind to think like an Unterzuyder and decipher the map! *And* not betray them.

They did not understand that Ralph Unterzuyder, alias Carruthers Straley, worked alone.

They would find it out. And so would Bigger Bailes.

He answered her direct question stiffly. "I shall continue to back off, Fayette. Love is an emotion which can be defined in various unflattering terms. I would not care to tumble your romantic castles! My mother—"

"Aha! Your mother!" She leaped upon the word with a knowing and very wide grin. Then she took advantage of his pinned position against the bulk head to kiss him again, determinedly and hard. For a wild half of eternity, his senses were swept away on a skittering whirlwind. Then by main force he tore away and lunged down the corridor.

"Mr. Straley!" There was a bubble of repressed laughter. "I was going to ask if you'd take me to the dance!"

HE did not answer. His flight was precipitous. It was not for several minutes that he realized the loss of his glasses had not impeded his vision. He leaned weakly against a bulkhead. Very early in life, his parents had insisted that the inherited weak eyes of

the Unterzuyders be made normal with ocular aids. Indeed, powerful, dark eye-glasses had grown, over the generations, to be a symbol of Unterzuyder autocracy.

His parents had been wrong.

Perhaps they had been wrong in other things.

He shuddered. Without his eye-glasses, he hardly felt himself to be an Unterzuyder.

Slowly, memory of his original purpose in ordering Captain Fos-hag to throw a dance came back.

In the ballroom, Beecher would be strutting to win the favor of somebody's wife.

With a bit more success, Fayette would have a dozen young husbands circling her moth-like.

Intrigue, thought Unterzuyder, and subtlety, is ever the adventurer's most potent weapon. The great general indirectly entices the foe away from his own most strongly held point!

Several minutes later, he was fitting his pass-key into the door of the Beechers' stateroom. He closed the door, switched on the radi-lights. The efficiently furnished little rooms were brightly flumined.

The map. Where? Start at the beginning. At first glance, *Tertium Organum* was not in the book-case. Then he reached in back of the row of lurid fiction titles and knew he had guessed correct-

ly. .

A little too correctly!

He felt one of the few cold chills of his life traveling on his spine. He opened the book and the map fell out. He sat down weakly. His fingers trembled as he smoothed out the heavy rag parchment.

A map of the Solar System. He dizzied. X marks the asteroid. Just as he remembered seeing it that long ago day when his great father showed it to him.

His father, that stern-faced giant in whom the valiant blood of the hibernating Unterzuyders flowed, had been most explicit. One of these years, the map would be given to Ralph. He would guard it with his blood. In the course of time, Ralph would give it to his son.

At long last, the hibernaculum would be opened, the dozen hibernating Unterzuyders would be brought to life with injections of anti-somnolene, and would once more take over their rightful place of dominance in the Solar System.

The position they had been scoured from by a relentless political regime which had smashed the Unterzuyders' fabulous tri-planet cartels, leaving the remnants in the form of a thousand rigidly controlled small holding companies.

The position they had been forced to flee from, leaving only

their children—and a hidden map.

Unterzuyder's fingers still shook. Sweat dribbled down his blonde hair-line. Something was wrong. Everything was wrong. The map itself was hideously out of scale.

The traced orbits of the planets were circular, *not* elliptical.

And the map itself.

*I should not have found it so easily.*

Counter-intrigue?

No time to lose.

From his inside pocket, he took the flat little *duplico-camera*, adjusted the frame over the map. He flipped the shutter. Seconds later, the map was back exactly where he'd taken it from.

There was only one sound in this quiet room, the tremor of the gas-thrust shoving the ship through dark void into the spaces beyond Jupiter. Suddenly, there was the scuffle of moving feet beyond the door.

UNTERZUYDER found himself in the position of a traveler in an alien city where savage little children had switched all the street signs. Nonetheless, he lunged for the door, threw off the lights in the stateroom, opened the door, closed it, stood with his back pressed against it.

Hurrying footsteps. Unterzuyder was after the sound.

The big, hurrying frame of Cap-

tain Foshag. Unterzuyder grabbed his arm, whipped him around. Foshag's hairy, dignified face was wrenched with astonishment.

"Mr. Straley," he said uncertainly. His brow clouded. He looked at Unterzuyder's grip on his heavy arm and frowned with displeasure. He shook off the hand. "I'm not used to being manhandled, sir! You've perhaps imbibed too much at the party?" He was being sternly insulting.

Unterzuyder crumbled. He could be wrong.

"I—haven't been well. My heart—" He touched at his chest apologetically. It wasn't too far from the truth. Pains in his chest. His mother had always assured him the Unterzuyders were prone to heart trouble. Just as she'd got around to making him wear glasses. Terrible uncertainties were crowding him. He was surrounded by treachery. Had Foshag been shadowing him?

Foshag's great frame rocked judicially on its toes.

"If you truly have a bad heart," he said measuredly, "you'd have taken the long trail when the *Ares* hit heaven. We humans often are plagued with strange influences. Words spoken to the unguarded mind of the child sometimes become fact to the grownup. I'd not worry about the heart. And now, the reason I am away from the

turret. I've been looking for you."

He cleared his throat. "There's a king-sized ship of the Silver type on our tail, Mr. Straley. I'm not the worrying kind, however. Worry is indeed the prime cause of most kidney troubles, and, besides, beclouds the mind when there's work to be done. Therefore, not until I observed that the pursuing craft was indeed pursuing—"

"Come to the point!" Everything else was swept away. Unterzuyder was suddenly furious at this big, stupid, philosophizing blunderer. "You're trying to excuse yourself for not telling me right away. Let's get to the turret!"

Unterzuyder went at full stride, his brain in high gear. They were being pursued. That arrogant Bigger Bailes, no doubt! So what? Add one more menace to those he was collecting. In fact, mess up the mess a little more.

"Captain Foshag," he said, "you are a well-read man. Ever read Ouspensky?"

Foshag nodded his square bearded chin. "A man of vast creative mental power, Mr. Straley. A man who seemed able to step off our three dimensions and look at the universe from a new viewpoint." Tentatively: "You have an interest in the classical philosophers, perhaps?"

Unterzuyder muttered something garbled. He trotted ahead of Foshag up the ramp to the glassed-in control turret, went past several instrument men to the viewing disk assembly. Foshag hurriedly got the pursuing ship on the cross-hairs. It was a great globoid catching golden-green Sun on one half, black interstellar shadow on the other.

"Raise it on the beam!" Unterzuyder ordered.

MOMENTS later, Ralph Unterzuyder was looking into the detested face of Bigger Bailes.

"That's me," smiled Bigger, his rosy face creasing. "Bigger Bailes. And how are you, Mr. Ralph Unterzuyder?" His smile became even more rosy.

Unterzuyder gulped. He was completely dismayed. Captain Foshag showed no reaction at the unmasking. Captain Foshag kept his face turned studiously away.

Unterzuyder felt himself going into a spin.

But he drew himself up and said haughtily, "Kindly keep your inside information to yourself, Mr. Bigger Bailes. I travel under the name of Carruthers Straley merely because there is an unsavory flavor to the name of Unterzuyder!"

"Now, why are you following us?"

"Following you?" Bigger Bailes

appeared injured. "I'm trying to catch up with you. I intend to come aboard—"

"*You will not!*" Unterzuyder yelled the words so loud the crew members in back of him half-jumped from their charts.

Bigger's image wavered on the screen as he leaned forward and settled back.

"I didn't expect such a reaction, Mr.—Straley," he said. His little eyes, almost hidden by fat, were penetrating. "I'd almost think you were hiding something. Are you?"

Foshag raised a commanding hand. "That'll be enough of that," he commanded. "We're a law-abiding ship. I myself am an honest man. Secrecy gives rise to certain nervous disorders which I avoid. If you wish to come aboard, perhaps you are taking advantage of some Space Article?"

"Taking advantage? If you want to put it that way. Two of my men are down sick. The usual spastic seizures. We've run out of ATG. We're coming aboard your ship to get some. Article 108 of the Space Constitution gives us that right."

Unterzuyder brushed Foshag aside.

"I warn you, Mr. Bailes," he said thickly, "if you have any ulterior motive, such as looting this ship, we will put up a fight! Our

settlers were chosen for their intrepid qualities. We have guns. We have bombs. We have a flare-cannon. You will not find us easy prey!"

Bailes leaned back easily. "Relax, Unterzuyder. As far as guns go, we've got our share. And we have got a brace of flare-cannons embrasured into the bulkheads of the *Space-Queen* ourselves, if you want to get tough."

He spread his fat hands. "But who wants to get tough? See you gentlemen, aboard your ship, twenty-four hours from now." With which remark he broke contact.

Unterzuyder was at Foshag instantly.

"Not a word about my identity," he breathed. "After all, I did pay you a thousand credits!"

"And for which I thanked you! Mr. Unterzuyder, I am not a secretive man. If asked a direct question, I seldom impair my health by lying. Now permit me to return to my duties."

Fuming, Unterzuyder left the control turret, went straight to the ballroom. Here, without any hesitation whatever, he cut in on Fayette, taking her away from the handsomest husband in the lot. No word of apology.

**H**E held her very close, very tight. He danced with a

mathematical precision. Even the soul of the dance, he reflected grimly, derives from a mathematical formula. The dummy four-piece band haggered out its hag-strut very effectively. He was rewarded as Fayette lost her surprised stiffness, and began to melt into him in perfect rhythm to the tune. Her blonde head gradually nestled into his shoulder, her eyes closed, a small, sweet smile on her lips.

At the first opportunity, he swung her without a break to a small observation lounge, and in the cold green glow of a million stars drew her to him, letting himself be stunned by the warmth of her and the drugging quality of her perfume. He kissed her. He was carried away into a land of intricate enchantment where Love is All, and the Girl in my Arms is You.

She opened her eyes, looking at him dreamily. "I love you," she murmured.

"I know," said Unterzuyder.

"I don't know what your intentions are. I don't care what kind of a sneaky, underhanded person you are, I still love you."

He kissed her again. She was crying. Unterzuyder took out his handkerchief and wiped away her tears. "Now don't worry, Fayette," he soothed. "Everything will turn out all right." He took her back to the dance floor. By

luck he found the young husband she'd been dancing with. He gave her back.

"Sorry!" he said. He gave Fayette a fleeting smile and hurriedly took off.

He went to his cabin and feverishly got to work. Plug up the loopholes as you go along! A favorite axiom of the Unterzuyders. Now that Fayette was in love with him, he could draw on her for any emergency.

Apparently the time was coming when he would need an ally.

He ran the negative through the hypo, put it in the dryer and paced the floor. He rubbed at his lips with the back of his hand. He could still smell Fayette's perfume. He could still feel her bare warm back. Careful, careful. He went to a mirror and looked at his face. Weak. The glassless eyes redrimmed. Thin nose and lips. His spirits dropped. How could Fayette be in love with him? Particularly when he was one of the outlawed Unterzuyders.

The finished photograph went into the automatic pantograph. He blew it up six times onto a square of Mirac paper. He smoothed the new map onto the desk. Instantly he saw why at first the map had appeared so impossibly distorted. The circles did not indicate the orbits of the planets. They were merely a logarithmic indication of

the scale of the map.

Mercury, being some 43,000,000 miles from the Sun, was the basic unit. And that was necessary.

The Solar System could not be drawn to scale unless the inner planets were crowded in fractionally close to the Sun.

Here, the positions of the planets were indicated by dots whose map-distance from the Sun receded inward in logarithmic ratio to actual distance.

Pluto, for instance, being one hundred times farther from the Sun than Mercury in real distance, appeared by the map to be only, roughly, twenty times as far.

The position of the dot-planets on the map of course indicated the *exact* date of the day when the map was drawn.

The finely drawn X showed the position of the hibernaculum asteroid *on that day*.

Since then, roughly eighty-two years ago, X had moved in its orbit. Where to?

That was the problem.

Unterzuyder sweated. It was said by the Unterzuyders, with possible justification, that only an Unterzuyder could think like an Unterzuyder. How often his father had told him that. But he was confused.

Naturally. The map was meant to confuse.

What were the figures at the bottom of the map?

S-I .7452  
C-I -.202

and

(0, 3, 2)  
(1, 1, 8)

And why, at the top corner, was the name unterzuyder printed *with a small u?*

Nobody but an Unterzuyder would know.

Well, he didn't know.

**P**UZZLED, he paced the room. Tomorrow Bigger Bailes would force his way aboard ship. Little could be done to stop him, partly because he insisted he needed ATG, a chemical staff of life necessary for muscular action, but mostly because he had superior fire-power. Actually, he wanted the map. If he didn't get it, he would inevitably loot the ship.

He paused before the mirror, again. Glassless, he didn't feel like an Unterzuyder. Looking upon himself naked of face, he cringed. If only the whole thing were over. If only he were in the observatory under the greenly burning stars with—

Frantically he stopped that line of thought.

He hauled out a sheaf of maps. He had come prepared. He had brought the duplico-camera, the

film developing equipment, the pantograph, other odds and ends. He had a shelf-full of celestial mechanic manuals, as well as books on the more ordinary arithmetics.

But he had had only one year of math. Somewhere along the line, he had outguessed his patriarch of a father and his matriarch of a mother: law had been the result.

Well suited, he had felt at the time, to the trickery, the deceit, and the orneriness of the typical Unterzuyder mind!

Anyway, he needed a slide-rule before he could tackle the equations. For the present, he would work out the date the map was made. Then it would be possible to discover X's present position.

All that was necessary was, mathematically, to rotate the present-time position of the planets backward in time—clockwise, that is—until they coincided with map-position.

The star-maps, the Emphemeris, and the Planet Catalogue should make that fairly simple.

After an hour, his nerves began to quiver. He ran his hands distractedly through his awry blonde hair. He had the answer. And it was impossible. Except that it was correct.

Apparently, the map had been drawn up in prehistoric times.

50,000 years ago!

AFTER a virtually sleepless sleep-period, he went to breakfast. The settlers were in a happy chattering mood. Titan was only ten days away. Unterzuyder ate with the pressure of the Beechers' eyes on him.

Nathaniel Beecher showed quiet menace on a face that ordinarily held grinning, shifty-eyed comrade. Fayette had sullen, angry shadows under her eyes. Perhaps she was smarting under a humiliation that might make her do dangerous things. He had left her rather abruptly at the dance. Unterzuyder hit his lip. Perhaps he had not covered that situation as well as he might.

Remorse was an emotion new to Unterzuyder. But then he had suffered some kind of mental upset when his glasses shattered under Fayette's heel. He could see as well as the next man, and consequently was beginning to have some shattering doubts about the wisdom of his immediate ancestors. And he *was* a man.

He gulped. All these were dangerous thoughts. He must continue to think like an Unterzuyder.

Something devious. Something tricky. Something that would competently accomplish the task of fooling the Beechers, Bigger Bailes, and possibly Foshag!

As he started out of the dining

room, Beecher lunged after him, trailing a rocket-stream of cigar smoke.

"A minute, Straley!" Beecher held him from the door, his close-set eyes full of dislike. "Foshag told me Bigger Bailes is back there." He jerked a shoulder. "You're a man with many small tricks, Straley," he went on slowly. "Probably you're the most dangerous man I've ever encountered. I've been around."

"I'll bet you have!"

Beecher gestured with the cigar, turned on his grin, apparently to convince anybody watching that this was a friendly conversation.

"But I'm not letting you get away with anything. We have to do something about Bailes. I don't intend to be hi-jacked. Truthfully, mister, I don't see why the settlers shouldn't be forewarned. They're a decent bunch. We're not.

"In fact," his eyes were boring, "I've known from the first that you've been using these people."

"As you have—and as you've attempted to use me!"

"Yes." Beecher's lips moved hesitantly. "You and I and Fayette are all three getting a free ride to Titan, aren't we? No expenses. So now that we've *almost* laid our cards on the table, why shouldn't we join forces?"

Unterzuyder drew himself up disdainfully. "I work alone, Beech-

er."

"Yeah." Beecher showed disgust. "You mean you're working for something no decent person would help you with."

"And you mean by that?"

Beecher's eyes simmered. He said nothing.

Unterzuyder snapped. "I still work alone—unless forced to recruit help. That condition may occur. In the meantime, use some of those qualities of leadership an *explorer* should have. Inform these people what's up. Tell them Bailes will probably attempt to loot the ship. Line the men up at the arsenal and load them down with weapons. Make arrangements so the women and children will keep to the cabins. Can you handle that?"

Beecher flushed until his face was bright red.

**L**EAVING him properly insulted, Unterzuyder went to the control turret where he cornered Foshag, drew him to the Solar Chart.

Unterzuyder picked up a pencil, made an indentation at random. It was considerably to the east of the *Ares'* present position.

"Change course immediately. To that point."

Foshag huffed rebelliously. "That won't help us outrun Bailes. The new course will but give him

a hypotenuse to travel. He'll run us down quicker."

Unterzuyder's lips turned thinner. Muttering, Foshag sat down to the computations. On the way out of the turret, Unterzuyder slipped a slide-rule out of an instrument case so deftly that nobody noticed.

Another hour's work showed him that the two sets of figures, respectively, indicated X's *point of origin* and *direction of travel*. *c* stood for cosine, of course, *s* for sine.

X had been, when the map was made, some degrees below the plane of the ecliptic. Its orbit was at a steep slant to that plane.

So what? So the point of origin was located in time 50,000 years ago?

The map was a fake!

He sat at the desk a long time, thinking, and thinking fast. Foshag must have known who he was from the first. He was an observing man, but he was also a close-mouthed man, who answered only to direct questions. And the Beechers knew his identity too. Fayette had accidentally called him by his real name. Treachery!

Undoubtedly, Bigger Bailes had tipped off the Beechers, just before Unterzuyder arrived at the Beechers' apartment in Marsport. Bigger Bailes thought Unterzuyder knew where the map was, but

didn't know the Beechers had it. Bigger intended to let the situation stir itself up so the asteroid's location would more easily come out of hiding.

Yes, everything was wrong. Bigger would loot the ship when he learned the map was a practical joke. Taking a ship this far beyond Jupiter would have to pay off. And there was nobody to stop him.

What was it his father told him about Unterzuyder techniques? Sell short at the top, buy long at the bottom. All events, good or bad, could be used to build a firmer superstructure!

Well, face it! Ship's course had been changed. The settlers by this time had demanded to know why. Beecher would tell them Carruthers Straley was Ralph Unterzuyder, hunting for a hibernaculum!

The settlers by this time were up in arms against him.

He paled. He leaped to the door, listened. Footsteps. Patrolling his room.

**H**E returned to the table. Make use of the situation. Dredge it for what it's worth! He crossed shakily to the audio and called Fayette's number. Luckily, Fayette and not her father answered.

"Fayette—darling." The word came out huskily. It was hard to say. It sounded real.

"Who?" Then her voice was uneven. "You called me darling. Are you sure you're in your right mind?"

"I mean it, dear." Did he? "I couldn't forget last night."

He was falling into the self-made trap of the dishonest, unable to tell his own truth from his own falsehood.

"All right," she said unevenly. "So you couldn't forget it? So what?"

He spoke softly. Please, he had to see her in his room right away. It was urgent. Would she come now? A long silence. Yes, she would come. No, she wouldn't tell her father. Positively. Five minutes later she slipped into the room. She barely opened the door. He took her instantly into his arms. When he figured he had kissed her enough, he let her drop limply into a chair.

The circles under her eyes were worse. She looked miserable. He drew up a chair, tenderly took her hands in his.

"Look at me, Fayette. I'm going to make a confession that will shock you. I'm not Carruthers Straley. I'm Ralph Unterzuyder."

She didn't look shocked. He pretended not to notice.

He told her selected portions of the story. "I suspected you had the map. I examined *Tertipepti Organum* in your apart-

day when you and your father were in the kitchen."

*And you wanted me to examine it! So I'd be sure to hire you and Beecher and take you with me to Saturn. That was the reason you posed as explorers, so Titan Settlers would give you a free ride to the vicinity of X!*

"I broke into your room last night, Fayette, and made a copy of the map."

*And you left it wide open for me, so I could put my Unterzuyder brains to work deciphering it!*

"And now that I've deciphered the map—"

That shocked her. "You *did*? But Daddy figured out it was made roughly 50,000 years ago!"

His heart fell to the bottom of his stomach. The Beechers hadn't got over that stumbling block either. He'd made a mistake in trying to pump her. He smiled feebly. But salvage *something* out of it!

"50,000 years," he said druggedly, "seems to be correct—"

She was on her feet, laughing half hysterically. "You're trying to say the Unterzuyders invented a time-machine? That they aren't hibernating at all? After all the trouble we've gone to—" She giggled. "That's rich, Ralph—"

Female instability. He held her tightly. A lie, a good solid lie. His The Reed. Bigger Bailes. "Of

course not, dear. The whole idea of a time-machine is fantasy—"

*Is it?*

"—and it'll make you feel better to know the map is purely contemporary. You noticed the ship changed course? Well, dear, we are headed toward X!"

She pushed away, her eyes amazed.

"And," he added happily, "you will also be glad to know that you and I and your father are going to collect the reward for finding the hibernaculum!"

"Really, Ralph? That was your intention all along? You weren't going to *free* them? Oh, I was hoping so hard you were going only after the reward—"

She switched her glance over his shoulder. Pity wrenched her face.

Something hit Ralph Unterzuyder hard on the back of the head. He fell straight down ten thousand miles, and lay there for quite a while studying patterns of light that squirmed in his head.

CAPTAIN Foshag was dragging him to a chair. His tufted eyebrows came close. He put a slopping cloth on Unterzuyder's forehead.

He said, "For the time, you're a prisoner in this cabin. I trust the experience will teach you some truths. Wickedness secretes vari-

ous poisons in the body, particularly the heart and the liver. Change your ways, and you may indeed live a long life!"

The door burst open and Beecher lunged in. His shrewd eyes rested on Unterzuyder.

"Sorry I had to bop you, Unterzuyder," he said in clipped accents. "But it was the best way to get you out of the picture and keep you from talking to Bigger Bailes. You might have messed up the works. As it was, we told him the truth."

"The truth?"

"Certainly. You admitted it to Fayette. That you'd figured out the orbit and present position of X. He got the course from Foshag and made us turn around toward Titan again. Then he took off for X. So we're whipped. But at least it kept us from being looted."

Unterzuyder ripped the wet cloth from his head and threw it somewhere. He laughed. He weaved about the room, holding his head and hooting, while Foshag and Beecher looked on with open mouths. Then Foshag forced him into a chair.

"Out of his head! Mr. Unterzuyder, please be quiet. That's better. There, there! Now we're going to leave you here for your own protection, Mr. Unterzuyder. The settlers are somewhat provoked. Do you agree?"

Unterzuyder grinned widely up at him.

"I'm sick," he groaned. "Tell Fayette I need her."

*There's still X to find.*

An idea had come to him.

**H**E was in bed, the white cloth on his forehead, when Fayette walked in. She looked at him without sympathy. Tentatively, she sat on the edge of the bed, curling one knee under another.

"I'm sorry if you think I played Delilah, Ralph—" she began.

He patted her knee delicately. "There, there," he soothed. "None of that matters. Actually, we're two of a kind. Not that we're naturally treacherous, but that we are indirect, the most dangerous weapon in the world. I wanted to discuss our plans. You see, marriage is a—"

She gripped his wrist, hard, to make him stop talking.

She said through her teeth, "After this, nothing but the truth!"

Inwardly he groaned.

She went on with determination. "I do love you. I do want to marry you. And settle on Titan. The important thing is, do you love me and really want to marry me? Are you going to be honest with me about things that concern only us? Of course, I don't mind if you're tricky with other people. That's life."

*Well, why not?*

Unfortunately, he would be unable to use her anymore for purposes of finding X. But apparently, he was in love with her.

He held her warm hands. "We'll get married and live on Titan," he said.

She leaned over and kissed him until he thought he'd be forced down through the bed.

He added, "But first I've got to get back in the good graces of the settlers." When she smiled incredulously, he said with confidence, "It should be easy."

And besides, it was necessary.

**A**s soon as Fayette left, he leaped out of bed and grabbed an encyclopaedia out of the bookcase. He looked up *Unterzuyder*, tracing down until he found the expected paragraph:

*The fabulous cartels of the Unterzuyders were built up through their amazing instinct on the stock market. When the market was bullish, they seemed to know when the crest was reached. Selling short in heavy amount at this point, they reaped millions in profit as the market fell, then caught the market again on the upswing. Invariably, the bulls were caught short by the Unterzuyder bears. The Unterzuyders seemed to draw some special inspiration from one famous interpretation of their*

*name, i. e., undersiders, those who work from the underside . . .*

Unterzuyder sent the book scurrying into a corner. His hunch had been right. But now was not the time to work out the rest of the puzzle. He dressed quickly.

When he walked into the dining room, where dinner was in progress, he was wearing the white bandage pinned around his forehead. He was also limping very slightly. Sympathy was nonetheless lacking. Complete quiet reigned in the dining room. The settlers kept their faces turned away, or looked fixedly at their plates.

Fayette's expression alone showed sympathy. He knew his own face was fiery red.

Nonetheless, he told the settlers everything he thought necessary. (They knew it anyway.) He apologized. He pointed out deviously that, after all, they were on the way to a new world. That much he had done for them.

"What you do not realize is that it was I, your leader, who diverted Bigger Bailes from looting the ship.

"Quite deliberately, I built up the feeling that the new course was the course to X, the hibernaculum of my criminal ancestors. All of you were convinced. Therefore Bailes became convinced.

"Had he known the Unterzuyder map was a fake, he would have

taken it out on you by looting the ship. I sent him off on a wild goose chase!"

Some of the settlers were looking at him with cautious interest. Beecher rose at this point.

"I can say something in favor of Mr. Unterzuyder," he said. "His intentions were good. Mr. Unterzuyder was only after the reward money. He did *not* intend to free the Unterzuyders, even though he is an Unterzuyder himself. And half of the reward money was to go into the treasury of Titan Settlers!"

Unterzuyder looked pop-eyed at Beecher. But now the settlers were frankly staring at him. After a moment, they began eating again. In several minutes more, the hall was full of chatter again.

After the most uncomfortable meal of his life, Unterzuyder headed for the door. Beecher caught up with him, grinning companionably.

"We did a good job, mister," he said. "I had my own reasons for backing you up. This thing'll blow over. Then I've got some ideas. You and I are sharpies, Unterzuyder. We could set up in business on Titan and build up one of the biggest fortunes in the System, eventually. What do you say?"

Unterzuyder smiled wanly and said he would think it over. Then

he went to his cabin. In two hours, he had plotted X's location to the dot.

Then he leaned back, nibbling nervously at the pencil eraser.

In five days, with good fortune, the infamous Unterzuyders would be awake and free . . .

IT took him two days of cautious footwork before the settlers completely dropped their hostility toward him. Then one evening he told them simply that they still had Bigger Bailes to worry about.

"When he discovers he's been fooled, it's possible he might head for Titan and try to loot the settlement. We have to be ready. For several weeks we'll have to be on guard. The space ship will be camouflaged. For awhile we'll suspend building operations.

"We'll be ready for offense and defense. We have three life boats which are maneuverable in empty space or in an atmosphere. These life boats must be equipped with food, with water, with weapons. I'm calling for volunteers to help me with that job."

It was a rude shock to Unterzuyder when Fayette became the first volunteer.

By the fourth day, the life boats were deadly offensive craft.

Unterzuyder paid particular attention to one of the life boats himself. Quite accidentally, it

became loaded down with extra weapons and supplies.

Only one thing bothered him. Fayette was underfoot all the time.

As the time of leaving approached, his nerves began to get the better of him. The time, however, *did* come. At 22:04 on the fifth day, in the middle of the sleeping period, he dialed open the airlock door to the blister in which the stout little life boat nestled. He closed it behind him, turned around. Fayette was standing at the hatch of the little ship, slickly dressed in shiny boots, smart beige jodphurs, and a blouse open at the throat.

She was holding her pet neutron gun with the snout pointed toward him. She was smiling confidently.

"Ralph," she said, "in my hand I hold a weapon. It is not indirect. It is not subtle. It does not practice deceit. It does not give half-answers. It says 'yes,' and it says 'no'. That's all it says."

"It also gets yes and no answers."

"But don't be afraid of me, Ralph. I'm here to help you!"

He found his voice. "Help me? I need no help! I work alone!"

"Nobody works alone, Ralph. Ask Captain Foshag. Most people run on compulsive commands given them by people who might even be dead. Parents mostly. Positive suggestion. The mind

works that way.

"Sometimes people are made to feel they're unhealthy, only they aren't really. Or they're told their eyes are bad. Or that they're superior to other people.

"It's just as if—" she frowned hard as if looking for an example "—as if *your* parents were sitting inside that smart blonde head of yours, Ralph, and telling you to free the Unterzuyders from their sleep. It's something you feel you *have* to do.

"But you *don't* have to, Ralph. I'm here to help you."

He stared at her, stunned.

He drew himself up arrogantly. "Put down that gun, Fayette."

If anything, she held the gun more firmly, and moved it three inches toward him.

"Don't mistake me, Ralph," she said, her eyes cold. "This is a yes and no game. No maybes or ifs. If you say yes when the gun says no, that's too bad. If you say no when the gun wants yes, that's too bad. You see how straightforward the three of us are?"

"But I and my pet neutron gun will give you time to think."

"Tell me how you found X."

**H**E slumped weakly against the bulkhead, wiping at his forehead with the back of a shaking hand.

"There were enough clues," he said hoarsely.

And there had been, at that. *Tertium Organum, A Key To The Enigmas Of The World*, was a key. Its author, Ouspensky, looked at the universe from a *different* viewpoint.

The small *u* in unterzuyder meant that it was to be taken as a common noun.

And certainly the conclusion that the map was made 50,000 years ago was itself an obvious clue!

"We made our calculations on the assumption that the map had been made looking at the Solar System from the north—from the star Polaris, that is. It hadn't been. My ancestors drew the map from the unorthodox reference point of the Southern Cross.

"From the underside. I turned the negative upside down and made a new map. Then I got right answers."

"Very good," said Fayette. "The tricky Underzuyders did live up to their name. Didn't they, Ralph?"

"Yes," he said shakily.

The gun wavered. Fayette was blinking. "Ralph, do you love me?"

"Yes . . . "

"Are you being truthful? Will you always tell me the truth, the whole truth?"

"Yes . . . "

"That's a good boy. Please keep on giving my pet the right answers. Ralph, don't you know that if you freed the Unterzuyders I couldn't ever look at you again?"

There were angry tears in her eyes. Unterzuyder suddenly remembered the time at the dance, when he had wiped away her tears. He should wipe them away now. He was weakening. He was an Unterzuyder. He should be strong. There was his duty . . .

"Fayette," he said hoarsely.

"Stand back." Her chin came up. "Answer the question! Yes or no."

"Yes."

"Do you want to marry me?"

"Yes, Fayette."

Her mouth opened and closed. Suddenly her shoulders heaved and she shook her head blindly. The gun dropped to her side. "Oh, Ralph. I can't do it. I was going to ask you if you still wanted to go ahead with it. But I can't. I can't force you. You'll have to make up your own mind!" She turned away, hiding her face with one arm. Instantly, he leaped for her, tearing the gun from her hand.

He looked at it where it lay black and ugly in his hands. He was seeing it very well, with his excellent Unterzuyder eyes. It slipped from his hand and fell to the floor. He let it lie, and took Fayette into his arms.

# A Zloor For Your Trouble

By

Mack Reynolds

Prescott stood to make a young fortune if  
he could capture a martian zloor—dead or alive!  
Was there a catch to it? Only for the hunter! . . .

I WAS sitting on the cot in the little room at the rear of my hangarage, where I keep my equipment and most of my trophies, and cleaning my .257 Roberts when the knock came at the door. It was a sharp, decisive knock. Then the door opened and I saw Westley Marks for the first time. It didn't excite me.

He said, "Mr. Napoleon Prescott?"

I began to say, "Everybody calls me Nap," but then I didn't. There was something about this guy that didn't click with me. Say what you will against snap judgments, I still take my love at first sight and enmity often the same way.

For one thing, he gave me the impression of *looking* for trouble; he was about six foot two and he had what he obviously thought was an aristocratic face. His nose was

the type that used to be called Roman—and looked like it'd be a honey to punch. He was dressed like a million, which didn't particularly impress me either. I'm on the rugged side myself, red headed and homely to boot.

He took in the rifle I was cleaning, and his eyebrows went up questioningly. "Collector?" he asked. Somehow or other he managed to put over the impression that he thought I didn't have the intellect to have a hobby.

"Not exactly," I told him. "This is a tool, not a collector's item."

There was almost a laugh in his voice now. "You mean you use that relic in your work?"

I put the gun down, told myself to take it easy, then said, "They've made a lot of developments in weapons since this rifle was popular, but it still has advantages on cer-



tain types of jobs. For instance, if I was after a Kodiak bear, up in the Alaska National Park—”

He snorted, “I’d take a Bazooka-rifle and be sure who came out on top.”

“Sure you would,” I told him, “and there wouldn’t be enough bear left to feed your dogs. I usually work for a zoo or a museum; they either want the animal alive, or in good mounting condition. I admit that they’ve got guns now that one man can carry that’d sink one of the old time battleships; okay, but in my line I seldom need one.”

He didn’t like my tone of voice, but he dropped the point and began looking around for a place to sit.

I hadn’t asked him to sit down, and I didn’t now.

I said, “Was there something I could do for you?”

“I wanted to hire you for a rather lengthy period,” he told me.

“I’m all booked up for the next six months.”

“This is something rather special.”

“It always is when somebody wants you to cancel a job with a regular client.”

He didn’t like me any better than I liked him, that was obvious. He said, “This comes under the heading of work for the govern-

ment.”

I told him, “There are other professional hunters. Some of them nearly as good as I am.” The last was sarcastic.

“Possibly better,” he said, “but none of them are your size.”

I COULD feel my face approaching the color of my hair at that one. “Keep my size out of it,” I snapped. I indicated with a thumb a little statuette on my desk. “The guy my mother named me after was pint size too. He got along all right.”

He looked over at Bonaparte. “Ummm,” he said. “Napoleon was a big name once—but he’s only a bust now.”

“Listen,” I told him, “you’re asking for a bust yourself. Why don’t you run along? I’m busy.”

He ignored me, found a chair that had nothing but a few magazines on it, tossed them to the floor and sat down. “Your name was brought up because you’re the smallest professional hunter on Earth. It’d save a few thousand credits in getting you to Mars and back.”

That stopped me. “What in kert are you talking about?” I growled.

“The government wants a specimen, at least one, of a zloor.”

“A what?”

"A zloor," he repeated. "A small Martian animal."

I scowled at him. "And just why does the government want a zloor?"

"That's a secret."

"Okay. I'll tell you another secret. Somebody else can catch the government a zloor. I've never been off Earth and I haven't any particular hankering to go now." I picked up the .257 Roberts again and reached for my oil can.

He got to his feet, something just this side of a sneer on his face, and said, "I doubt if you could have got one anyway."

I said easily, "If anyone else could catch it, I could."

He reached for the doorknob, "I'd lay a thousand credits against that," he said. He began to leave.

"Wait a minute, buddy," I snapped. "Are you just sounding off or have you got a thousand credits you don't care what happens to?"

He turned and faced me. "I am willing to wager a thousand credits that you can't capture a zloor."

"How big are they?"

"About the size of a rabbit."

I glowered at him. "They very fast, or very poisonous, or what?"

He shrugged. "They can't run quite as fast as a common Terran hare, and I understand they're

quite gentle."

"Then why haven't they been captured?"

"Among other things, Napoleon," he rolled my name over his tongue as though he got a big laugh from it, "there have been only a few hundred persons in all that have gone to Mars. Few of them, to my knowledge, have been interested in the life forms there. The expense of freight in space is much too high for Terran zoos to transport Martian life forms—particularly alive—considering the cost of duplicating in the space craft the living conditions necessary to—"

"All right," I snapped, just a minute." I picked up the visophone and dialed rapidly. In seconds, Jerry Mason's friendly pan lit up the screen.

"Listen, Jerry," I said, "Have you ever heard of a Martian zloor?"

His eyebrows went up. "Sure, what—"

"Are they particularly fast?"

"No, of course not. But—"

"Are they dangerous?"

He grinned, but he was still puzzled. "I'd say they were about the least dangerous animal I ever heard of. But, Nap—"

"Just one more question, Jerry, I'm in a hurry. Do you think I could catch one?"

"I can't think of anything you

could catch easier." He started to give one of his short bursts of laughter. "But—"

"Thanks, Jerry," I told him. "See you later." I snapped off the set and turned back to Westley Marks.

"All right, answer just one question and I'll take up that bet of yours. What's secret about this?"

"If I tell you, you'll take on the job?"

"The job, *and* the thousand credit bet," I grated.

"Very well. It is suspected that the zloor is an alien life form."

I stared at him. "Are you around the corner?" I demanded. "Of course it's an alien life form. Didn't you just say it's a Martian animal?"

"Ummmm. But some authorities think it is alien to this solar system. At least they suspect so—that's why the government wants a specimen to dissect and thoroughly investigate. They haven't the facilities on Mars, of course, so it will be necessary to bring one back here."

I still stared at him. "Alien to the solar system? Your roof *must* be leaking. How would it get here?" A sudden suspicion hit me. "You mean it's intelligent? I thought there wasn't any intelligent life forms on Mars."

He shook his head. "It's a stupid herbivorous animal." He shot a glance down at his watch. "The shuttle for the space station leaves in three hours. Can you make it?"

I glared at him. "You give me plenty of time, don't you?—I'll make it all right. But first I want this bet down in writing."

"Of course," he said smoothly.

I HAD to hustle plenty. The zloor wasn't any bigger than a rabbit, and I knew that life forms on Mars were in general small, so I took nothing larger than my little carbine size .22 Hornet, another gun that Westley Marks probably would have sneered at but which I wouldn't have traded for all the automatics you could shake a stick at.

I didn't take much else; no clothes except the shorts I wore when I climbed into the shuttle rocket for the space station. When Marks said freight rates in space were high he just wasn't whistling, *Terra Forever*. I could buy clothes and any other equipment I needed a good deal cheaper on Mars than the cost of transporting them there would come to.

For one thing, when anybody left the colony planet to come back to Terra, they invariably left behind everything in the way of

clothing and personal equipment; for another, a certain amount of these things were being manufactured on Mars from native raw materials in an attempt to escape the murderous space rates.

After the four G's acceleration had cut off and we were in free fall, I took the opportunity to read the contract I'd hurriedly signed with Wesley Marks. On thorough reading, the contract didn't seem *too* bad. All my expenses to and from Mars were paid by Marks. I also got five credits a month in the way of salary—no fortune, but average pay for a Terran worker. If I caught a zloor and brought it back alive, I got a five hundred credit bonus; if I brought two back alive, a seven hundred credit bonus. If I brought a dead one back, I got a three hundred bonus. Westley Marks didn't seem to be interested in getting more than one dead one since there wasn't any provision for a larger number.

He'd given me to understand that this job was for the government, but from the way the contract read I was working for the Marks Enterprises. That irritated me for a minute or so, but I finally shrugged it off. He probably had a government contract to secure one of the things. I still couldn't figure out what his angle was—but

I knew there must be one; too much money was involved to make this a routine assignment such as I usually work on for the zoos. Evidently Marks ran some sort of an expediting outfit which took on off-trail contracts.

At this point I might do a little in the way of describing my trip to the space station which circles Terra and is used as a take-off point to Luna and the planets. I might go on and tell of my journey from there to the space station in orbit about Mars, and then, further still, of my shuttling down to Fort Mars and my first impressions of landing there, of the one-sixth gravity, the thin air, the plastic dome which covers the whole little city. But the trouble is that a hundred people a lot quicker with a dicto-typewriter than I am have already done the job. I'll just leave that part of it and take up with my first contact with my fellow Terrans on Mars.

One of the old gags is to the effect that when Greek meets Greek they start a restaurant. Okay, maybe, but I do know this, that when man in general starts up a new colony one of the first buildings he puts up is a bar.

At any rate, as soon as I was settled at the Biltless Hotel—the name, of course, is a gag, but the place lived up to it—I made my

way to Sam's.

**N**OW, there's something that invariably happens to people who get around. It's happened to you, if you're one of us. Maybe you're walking through the Congo Game Preserve, figuring there isn't another man, white or otherwise, within a hundred kilometers. Suddenly you run into another party and somebody yells, "Hello Nap! What in kert are you doing here?" The last time you saw him was in San Francisco. Or maybe you're doing some solitary drinking in some obscure bar in Guatemala. The guy next to you looks over and says, "Say, aren't you Nap Prescott, the brother of—" and, of course, you are.

Well, that was it. I hadn't any more got up to the bar and told Sam, "Let me have some of this Martian *woji* I've been hearing so much about," when I heard somebody yelp, "It's Nap! I'll be a grinning *makron* if it isn't Nap!"

I turned around and there was Mike Holiday, as big as life and twice as drunk.

He waddled his bulk over to me—Mike always waddles when he's soused—from the table where he'd been sitting.

"By the Holy Jumping Wodo," he crowed, "I'll bet my left arm you came to get a zloor."

I'd been grinning and holding out my hand to clasp his, but that stiffened me.

He saw it and began to laugh uproariously. "Another joiner of the club!" he yelped. "Come on over and meet your fellow members. You got one of them Westley contracts too?"

That did it.

I went over and met the boys. Mike Holiday wasn't the only acquaintance of mine in Fort Mars. In fact, it was like a convention of the outstanding professional hunters of Earth.

They all shouted their greetings, some of them laughing so hard tears rolled down their cheeks. Evidently they got a big kick every time a newcomer was added to their ranks. I shook hands with some, but most were too hilarious to go through the ceremony.

Blackie Conover yelled, "I'll bet anybody two to one he brought a .22 Hornet to shoot himself a zloor. Two to one!"

"Do we look like suckers?" Mike yelled back at him.

I sank into a chair and took it for awhile. "I can wait," I growled at them. "Sooner or later somebody'll get around to telling me what goes on."

"He can wait, he says," Doughbelly fairly yelped in delight. "Brother, he ain't just a whistlin'

*Terra Forever*, he can wait! Bring on the woji! Start the initiation!"

I WOKE up in the morning in Mike Holiday's apartment. I groaned and told myself that I was sworn off of woji for all time.—I didn't know then that Terra-side liquor sold for ten credits a bottle.

Mike was grinning down at me. "You'll get used to woji," he said.

"I should live so long," I moaned. Then I sat up suddenly in the bed. "You guys wouldn't tell me anything last night," I said. He was still grinning. "That's part of the initiation into the Zloor Club. What'd'ya want to know, Nap?"

I swung my feet over the side of the bed and came to a sitting position. I groaned and shook my head in an attempt to clear it.

"What are half the professional hunters I know doing on Mars?"

He spun a chair around so that the back faced me, and straddled it, his arms resting on the top rung. "Same thing you are, Nap. Being suckers for that *makron* Westley Marks."

I started to say something there but he interrupted me with a wave of a hand. "This is what it boils down to. Marks has a contract with some branch of the government to bring back one or more

zloors. And don't ask me why he doesn't go out and catch one himself—he's tried."

"He has, eh?"

"Yeah, he has. Had a whole crew up here. What makes it nice for him is that he's on a cost plus basis. If he never succeeds, it'll still be money in his pocket; if he does, he gets a whopping big bonus. Every time he sends another man up here to take a crack at getting a zloor, he makes money. No doubt the way he told *you* the story, you'd think you were the only one trying."

I snorted, "He told me I'd been picked because I was the smallest pro hunter in the game."

Mike Holiday grinned. "He picked me because I was so big.—I could stand the rigors of life on Mars, he said."

"Well, if it's a racket, why doesn't everybody go home on the next ship?"

"Probably for the same reason you won't. That sharper made me so sore I bet him five hundred credits I could catch a zloor."

"I bet him a thousand," I groaned.

Mike whistled. "Where'd you ever get a thousand credits, Nap?"

"I broke into my piggy bank," I growled. "It's every cent I had in the world."

"Well, we're all in the same

boat. He made bets with all the boys. If we go back, we lose. As long as we stay here we make five credits a month, plus expenses.—And, besides, all of us are just conceited enough to think we can figure out eventually how to get one of the things home."

"Now we're getting to the point," I told him. "What's so hard about catching a zloor?"

He began to grin again. "Nothing," he said. "And that's all I'll tell you now. Go out and find the gruesome details yourself."

I went over to the wash basin and filled the bowl and dipped my head into the water. I didn't say anything else to him until I'd dried myself and climbed into my clothes.

"All right," I said then. "Where do I go to see about getting equipment and men for an expedition to the zloor country?"

He laughed. "All you need in the way of equipment is your feet, that is, besides a plastic oxygen mask when you leave the dome." He pointed out the window. "Just head for the nearest rocky area, there's lots of it; you won't have any trouble finding a zloor. In fact, they're numerous—no natural enemies."

I scowled at him. "What keeps them down then?"

"Insufficient forage, I guess.

You'll see."

I picked up my .22 Hornet rifle and started for the door. "No time like the present to—" I began to say.

Mike was still grinning in the irritating manner he'd been displaying ever since the night before. "You won't need that gun," he told me.

"I'll just take it along anyway," I snapped.

AFTER leaving the dome through one of the airlocks, I headed out onto the surface of Mars, weighted down with my leaded boots, standard equipment for cutting down some of the effect of the one-sixth gravity of the planet.

Over to the westward, possibly three miles away, seemed to be a barren, rocky area. I knew that Mike Holiday wouldn't have deliberately lied to me, that was where zloors were to be found. I made my way in that direction.

"About the size of a rabbit," I muttered. "And half the hunters on earth can't bring one back."

I made the rocky area and found myself a suitable prominence from which to look around. In less than fifteen minutes, I'd spotted one of the things. They were about the size of a rabbit all right, and what was more they looked considerably like one of the earth type rodents

—long ears, nub of a tail. I watched it for some time through the small glass I'd borrowed from Mike.

It was evidently eating the bark, and possibly the wood as well, of a stunted, rugged looking Martian tree which seemed to be growing out of almost solid rock.

The boys had said that there were a lot of zloors around so I didn't have to worry about conversion. I took up the rifle, aimed carefully through the scope and squeezed the trigger. I was interested, eventually, in getting a live zloor, but it wouldn't hurt to have a closer look at one of the things to help me in planning my campaign.

The gun snapped and I could see the tiny bullet spank into the little animal's side. I'd got him!

But something didn't look right. I took up the telescope again and peered through it. The zloor was still eating.

That stopped me. I could have sworn that I'd hit it, right amidships.

I aimed even more carefully this time, for its head, and squeezed gently. That shot, too, hit dead center.

But the zloor didn't bother to stop its feeding.

I sat there a long time staring at it. Finally I snorted inwardly.

Obviously, this was what had been stopping the others—this animal had some very effective natural body armor. Well—there is more than one way of skinning a zloor, as well as a cat.

I picked up the rifle and headed down toward the tree and the animal that was devouring it, figuring to get as close as possible with the idea of getting a really good look at the bulletproof beastie. I wished, now, that I'd brought my .257 Roberts instead of the .22 Hornet.

At first I was careful in my approach, slipping from cover to cover; but as I got closer it became evident that the zloor wasn't particularly timid and that as far as it was concerned I could come as near as I wanted.

I stood off about five feet and watched it for a long time. Once it looked up and over at me, but then went back to the tree in which it was making a respectable hole.

I tried once again with the rifle, aiming carefully right behind its ear. The gun snapped, and the bullet thudded—but the zloor ignored it.

"Holy Wodo," I snorted. "He's *really* bulletproof."

In fact, he was more than just bulletproof. The *shock* of the impact of the high powered twenty-two hadn't even bothered him, it wasn't just a matter of the bullet's

inability to penetrate the hide.

"Well," I told myself. "Let's see just how close I can come before it runs off."

I WALKED up to him cautiously. He didn't move. In my surprise, I even prodded him gently with my shoe. He still didn't move. He looked up at me again, his eyes a wistful yellowish color, then went back to his meal.

I shook my head, wondering if I was still suffering from the effects of the woji binge, or what. This was just too easy—maybe it was a sick one or something.

I reached down and grasped it by the ears and started to pick it up.

Have you ever tried to pick up something and found out it either weighed considerably more, or was fastened to the floor? That's what happened to me. With Martian gravity what it is, I figured I'd have a weight of possibly one earth pound of lift. Instead, I nearly broke my back—and the zloor still didn't budge.

I put more pressure to bear, all my strength—and the zloor complacently went on eating.

Hands on hips, I stood above the rabbit-like animal and stared at it.

Finally, I muttered, "More than one way to bring home a zloor,"

and, taking my gun by the barrel, I swung it viciously down at the gentle looking little animal—feeling like a heel as I did it.

I might have saved my feelings, because two seconds later I was gazing wide-eyed at the shattered stock of my rifle and the zloor was still eating away at the tree.

I tried just one more experiment before I called it a day. I put the rifle barrel under him and tried to pry him off the ground. The zloor still ignored me, but the steel barrel bent under the pressure. The animal hadn't budged.

WITHOUT knocking, I walked back into Mike Holiday's room. He was lying stretched out on the bed, his hands behind his head, staring at the ceiling.

He didn't need to look at me. He said, "Nap, you are now a full fledged member of the zloor club."

"What does one of those things weigh?" I snapped.

"Hey, red-head," he grunted, "don't take it out on me, I didn't invent them. Far as I know, nobody's ever weighed one, but it's been estimated that they go about five tons here on Mars. Six times that on earth."

"That's insane!"

"Sure is. That's why the government wants one so badly. Just isn't natural for such an animal

to develop in the solar system."

"Or anywhere else!"

He got up on one elbow and grinned over at me. "The theory is that it's a life form from some planet belonging to a white dwarf star. Some time ago a guy named Adams at the Mount Wilson observatory, back on Earth, estimated that the density of some of the white dwarfs was two thousand times greater than platinum. I'm not much up on it myself."

I scowled down at him. "How'd it get here?"

He was serious now. "That's the reason the government wants one so badly, Nap. They want to get it to their laboratories and find out everything they can. There only seems to be one possibility, though."

"What's that?"

"If it is alien to the solar system and from a white dwarf's planet, it might have been brought here deliberately and left as a guinea pig."

I began to say something there but he held up a hand to stop me. "Possibly an exploring - spaceship from the alien planet was looking for colony sites. When it got to our solar system it left some of these animals with the idea of coming back in a few thousand years or so to see if the zloors were able to adapt themselves to

the conditions existing here."

I ran my tongue over suddenly dry lips. "You mean that if the zloors can live in our solar system, then these more intelligent aliens would figure they could use our sun system for a colonizing project?"

He nodded.

"Holy Wodo," I said. "No wonder they want some specimens to work on back on Earth."

He relaxed again. "Well, at the rate we're going, it'll be a long time before earth laboratories ever have the opportunity to mess around with our pal the zloor."

I GOT a chair and sat down facing him and said seriously, "Mike, brief me on what you and the other fellows have tried."

"You don't have to ask. That goes with membership in the club," he grinned. "Among other things, we've tried building a steel box around one of them with the idea of putting wheels on it later."

"That sounds good."

"Uh huh. The trouble was that when the zloor felt like moving he walked right through the side of the steel box like you or I'd walk through a wall of tissue paper."

"How about poisoning one?" I rapped. "You could get a dead one back a lot easier than—"

"They don't poison," he said,

"and from what we can figure they're practically immortal. We have never found a dead one."

"What'd'ya mean, they don't poison?"

"Just that. Nap, that animal can eat *anything* organic and thrive on it. Evidently, no poison that nature has ever produced affects it. At least, none of us have been able to dream one up."

"How about narcotics, something to dope it?"

He shook his head. "To begin with, some of these Martian plants produce narcotic effects that make the products of our poppy look like food for babes; but the zloor takes them in its stride. It's *really* got a cast iron stomach. We've never been able to locate anything it won't eat and enjoy eating."

I didn't say anything for a long time. Then, "A Bazook-rifle would kill one."

"Sure," he said, "and splatter it all around the scenery at the same time. The laboratories need a *good* specimen."

There was another long silence. Finally I said, "Why in the name of Wodo don't they sink into the ground if they weigh as much as all that?"

"They would, only they make a point of walking on rock. That must be one of the things that limits their spreading even more wide-

ly. They have to be able to forage on ground that supports very little vegetation."

"You could lift one with a derrick."

He said, "This is the fifth time I've been through this. Every guy that Westley Marks sends up here asks the same questions. Sure you could lift it with a derrick if the derrick was big enough. Do you have any idea of what it'd cost to bring a derrick of that size to Mars?

"And that's not the only thing, either. These zloors are gentle as lambs, but they hate to be confined against their will. That derrick'd have to have some awfully strong equipment to keep the zloor from breaking loose and ambling off. There's other angles there, too. Suppose your derrick did lift him into the shuttle. When you got the shuttle up to the space station, how'd you move the zloor from the shuttle to the station and then from the station to the rocket for Terra?"

He go up from the bed and went over to a little table to return with a bottle and a couple of glasses. He poured two drinks and handed me one. "Here," he said, "you look like you could use a quick one. Have a hair of a dog that's going to bite kert out of you before you ever leave Mars."

I grated, "I could stand the rest of it, but what burns me up is that *makron* Westley Marks. Here he is getting rich on the project. Besides what he makes from the government, he's bet every one of us so much that we'll all be out our life savings when we go back."

"Brother Nap, you have said it," Mike Holiday said feelingly. He tilted the glass to his lips and drank deeply. I was right behind him.

**I**T was more than two years later when I walked into the office of Westley Marks. I noted with pleasure that he still looked as aristocratic as ever.

"Ah," he said, "Mr. *Napoleon* Prescott. As I recall, the last time we met you objected to my calling your namesake a 'bust.' Don't tell me that we have an additional bust in—"

I loved it. I loved every word of it. And he must have seen that I did.

"What are you grinning about?" he barked. It was the first time I had seen his poise disturbed.

"Frankie," I told him, "is at the spaceport right now. Johnny will be down on the next shuttle. As you can imagine, the shuttle was pretty well strained to capacity to bring even one at a time. It was no trouble in space of course, since they were weightless in free fall,

but entering the gravitational—"

He put his hands on the top of the desk and half came to his feet. His eyes were wide. "Who are *Frankie* and *Johnny*?"

I feigned surprise. "Frankie and Johnny are sweethearts—a couple of zloors, in this case. Remember? You sent me for them. I thought a male and a female would be best."

He slumped back in his chair. "You aren't lying?"

I didn't say anything.

"How . . . did you do it?"

"With peach pits," I said.

"Peach pits!"

"Peach pits. They like apricot pits too, and sometimes prune seeds."

"What in the world are you talking about, Prescott? Have you lost your mind?"

I opened the humidor on his desk, took out a cigar, smelled it, bit off the end, lit it, and took a deep puff before answering him. I settled down into a comfortable chair and pointed the lighted end of the cigar in his direction.

"Between one or the other of us we had tried everything, everything. I realized finally that it would have to be an entirely different approach."

**I** TOOK another satisfying drag on the cigar, then went on. "I

tried lettuce, cabbage, corn, string-beans—everything in fact that the hydroponic tanks on Mars could supply in the way of earth type food. None of it worked."

"What in hell are you talking about?" Marks blurted.

I ignored him. "Finally it came to me. Lettuce and the other vegetables I offered would be too *light* for them. I tried walnut hulls and then peach pits, and that worked like a charm."

"You must be insane."

"You don't seem to understand, Marks," I told him. "There was no other way of getting a zloor on board an earth bound rocket, so I made pets of a couple of them. They love peach pits—regular delicacy for them." I added reflectively. "You'd be surprised how well trained I've got Frankie and Johnny; I'll hate to give them up."

I tapped the ash of the cigar off on his heavy carpet and said, "However, business is business. Let's see, by our contract you owe me five credits for each month I've been gone, plus a seven hundred credit bonus for bringing back two live zloors, then there's that thousand credit wager we made."

He snapped on his inter-office communicator and growled instructions to his secretary to find whether or not I had brought back two live zloors in the Mars rocket.

We sat there silently while she checked. I puffed on the cigar with appreciation and dropped the ashes, pointedly, on the floor. He was irritated, but wouldn't give me the satisfaction of complaining.

I knew I was being childish, but I loved it.

The inter-office communicator buzzed and he listened to his secretary's report, then reached down into his desk for a checkbook.

He said while he was writing it, "I'm sure you'll be pleased to know, Prescott; that in spite of this sum I'm giving you, I'll still make a considerable profit on this deal."

I took the check and examined it carefully.

"Ummm," I told him. "But I wouldn't be very surprised if a good deal of that profit is going to be melting away."

"Eh? What do you mean?" he snapped.

I told him, "The other boys up on Mars are still well equipped with peach pits. They're all making pets too. The next few rockets from Mars are going to be loaded with zloors, Westley, old man. You're going to have a flock of bets to pay off—and, besides that, I'm wondering if the government is going to want that many zloors. As I understand it, two is all that they contracted for

with you. Of course, you'll have fanning the check to dry it, but to pay the boys for them—" he looked as though he'd met his Waterloo.

He didn't say anything as I left,

—The End—

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"The professor won't tell anyone where he picked it up—man! Look at that flower!"



# REPEAT PERFORMANCE

*By*

*Rog Phillips*

**The little man knew Ben had been murdered; the trouble was, Ben was still alive! Could the future be wrong—or merely a dress rehearsal?**

THE pounding at the door woke me up. I groped for the light. It flooded the room, erasing the glow of the afternoon sun through the drapes. The clock said three-thirty.

"Come on, Benny! Open up!" a gruff voice ordered.

I groaned as I recognized the voice. As I went to the door I hastily reviewed last night's activi-

ties. Two wallets on the subway that had netted seventeen bucks, one in an elevator at the Morrison that had added forty-five bucks. An all night crap game near the Wilson El that had nearly cleaned me . . .

"Come in, Calahan," I said cheerfully to the cop. "A social visit—I hope?"

Calahan grinned mirthlessly at



my little joke. I got dressed. An hour later I was shoved into line with a dozen others. We knew what to do. We walked single file onto the stage, then faced a screen. We couldn't see beyond it because it was dark there, and floodlights from the floor and the ceiling blinded us.

"That's the man!" a woman's voice said excitedly.

My stomach did a flip flop. Who did she mean? Me? I looked at the others in the line-up. Joey North was looking sick. The others just looked uneasy, like I felt. Poor Joey . . .

On the sidewalk outside the station I lit a cigarette with shaking fingers. I hated the whole system. They take you down in a car. You walk home. If you get out. Suddenly I was sick of Chicago, and when I get sick of Chicago I go somewhere.

Night found me at the counter in a drugstore in Evanston. I was beginning to feel better. I had a newspaper and a cup of coffee in front of me.

I'd read everything else, so I started reading the society stuff. A lot of it was Evanston. A bosom-type matron smirked at me from one of the pictures. Under the picture it said she was Mrs. Sarah Fish, Evanston society leader. I started to read more. Then this little guy came into the drugstore.

"A package of Camels," he said to the cashier.

He sensed my stare. I looked quickly down at my paper and casually took a sip of coffee. But I wasn't interested in the news now. Out of the corner of my eye I studied the little man. He wasn't more than five feet tall, very slim, and very erect. I got the strange impression of looking at a small giant. Then I realized what caused that impression. It was his head. It was more the right size for a man six feet tall.

"That will be twenty cents," the baldish cashier said.

The little man handed him a bill he had been holding in his hand. "By the way," he said as the cashier rang up the twenty cents, "Could you tell me the way to the Sarah Fish residence?" I pricked up my ears at that.

"Why yes," the cashier said. "You go down to the stop sign and turn right two blocks. It's the big white place set back from the street, with a wide driveway that goes back to a four car garage. Let's see now. That was twenty cents. Twenty-five, fifty, one. Two, three. There you are. Don't forget, the big white house."

"Thank you," the little man said.

I watched him go to the door. It wasn't until he was out of sight that I did a double take.

"Hey!" I said to the cashier. "What kind of a bill did that little guy give you?"

"Why, a — a — Oh good Lord."

I slid out of my seat at the counter and leaned over the cigar counter as the cashier rang up a no sale. He picked out the bill and held it in limp fingers. I took it and spread it on the glass counter.

IT was a three dollar bill. There was a picture of Truman on it. I turned it over. On the back was a picture of an atomic mushroom cloud with a series of ellipses interlocking to form the popular conception of an atom.

It looked like real money. It had the feel of real money.

"Well," the cashier said philosophically. "I guess I'm out three dollars. His talking was what threw me off."

I picked up the three dollar bill and squinted at the fine print. It said *Series of 1964*. The date on my newspaper on the counter beside my cold coffee was April 5, 1954.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," I said. "I'll give you three dollars for it."

"Oh no!" the cashier said quickly. "I can't do that. The law says I must turn all counterfeit money directly over to the nearest F.B.I. office."

"Sure," I soothed. "Sure, I know that. But this isn't the same thing. A counterfeit is an imitation of real money—and there aren't any real three dollar bills."

The cashier chuckled suddenly. "By gollies you're right," he said. "That means I can keep it. Think I will. I'm going to deposit it in the bank tomorrow morning. Just for a laugh. Ned Sparks'll fall off his high stool when he sees it."

"I'll give you three and a half for it," I said.

But I was already turning away as he shook his head. I knew the only way to get a three dollar bill was to catch up with the little man.

Outside the drugstore I looked up the street the way the little man had gone. He wasn't in sight. I saw the stop sign a block away, and hurried toward it.

It was Lincoln Avenue, in a part of Evanston that was just like a small town set off by itself, downstate instead of a northern suburb of Chicago. I followed the directions the cashier had given the little man. Turn right two blocks.

I still hadn't seen the little man by the time I reached the big white house with the four car garage. The house itself had one of those old colonial porches with six pillars holding up a porch roof with unnecessary solidity. Between

the pillars brightly lit huge windows brought a clear view of the interior.

A party of some sort was going on. That's the way it looked. People standing in small groups holding glasses.

I hesitated. I wanted a three dollar bill, but was it worth it, to go up to the door and ask for someone I didn't know? I decided it was, and went up the walk as though I belonged there.

Beside the huge door was a button. I pushed it, and heard a series of chimes ring out. A few seconds later the massive door swung open and a middle aged man with a jovial expression said, "Come in, come in. I'm George Wile. Sarah's somewhere. What's your name? Sorry I can't keep track of all of Sarah's friends."

"Ben Smith," I said, stepping inside.

"Sarah'll show up in a minute," George Wile said, and promptly forgot me.

That was okay by me. I stood by the door looking around, trying to spot the little man. A gorgeous young thing held a tray in front of my face until I took a tall glass that contained, I discovered, an excellent Tom Collins.

I couldn't see the little man anywhere. I mosied across the room to the archway to another room where there were more people. He

wasn't there either.

A distinguished appearing man seemed to be the center of attraction here. I edged into the crowd around him and finally deduced that he had earlier given a book review or lecture or something, and this was the refreshment period before everyone went home.

Still no sign of the little man.

Suddenly a sharp tapping sounded I turned my head. A woman with a large bust was pounding a gavel on the small stand. Around me the buzz of conversation dropped off into silence.

"Is there a Mr. Ben Smith here?" she asked.

"He's here somewhere, Sarah," George Wile's voice sounded loudly. "Where are you, Ben old boy?"

I was too startled to speak for a second or two. Then I said, "Yes!"

Sarah Fish separated me from the crowd with her eyes, then came toward me. There seemed to be concern, a mixture of pity, and something else in her expression. When she reached me she said in a low voice, "Please come with me, Mr. Smith."

No one was paying attention to us. The conversational murmur was on again. I followed her into the front room and around to a door underneath the stairs that arched up to a balcony.

**S**HE opened the door and stood aside for me to go in. There was still that strange something in her expression. I tried to place it, then went past her into the room.

The little man was there, standing across the room against a backdrop of shelves filled with books. His piercing eyes flicked at me. Then he lifted his arm and examined his wristwatch.

"Right on the second," he said, a shade of disappointment in his tone. "I'd hoped this time you'd be off a few seconds." He lowered his arm and advanced toward me, hand outstretched politely. "I'm Sam Golfin," he said. "I want to ask you some questions, Benny. And this time I hope I get the right answers."

I ignored his hand. "How'd you knew my name?" I demanded. "How'd you know I came here?"

"Oh dear," Sarah Fish said. "I don't know how to tell him, Sam. You'll have to."

Sam Golfin gave her a sympathetic glance, then looked grim. "This time," he said, fixing me with a stare, "I'm not going to try to spare your feelings. In—" He studied his watch again. "—exactly one hour and seventeen minutes you are going to be murdered. A man doesn't just get murdered without knowing who might have done it, who his enemies are. Someone in this house is going to

kill you. *Who is it?*"

"You see," Sarah Fish said, her bosom expanding in an anxious breath, "you *must* tell us who did it."

I stared at them both, then gave what I intended to be a derisive laugh, but it sounded thin. "What makes you think I'm going to be murdered?" I said.

"For one thing," Sam Golfin said cautiously, "it's in tomorrow's papers."

"Oh, I see," I said sarcastically.

"I know you must think I'm joking . . ." Golfin said.

"Hardly," I said. And it was the truth. I thought he was crazy.

"I'm glad you don't," Sam Golfin said with relief. "Every minute counts if we are to save you."

"Save me?" I mocked. "But I thought you said it was in the papers. So it must be true."

"I'm not so sure," Golfin said with an important frown. "I'm not so sure the future can't be altered. That's why I'm here. I want to see if I can change the future. If I can . . ." He left whatever thought he was toying with unspoken.

A sudden thought shattered my amused point of view. That three dollar bill. It had been a *Series of 1964*, something utterly absurd by itself. But coupled with Sam Golfin's obvious conviction that I was going to be murdered, and his talk

of changing the future, it made a pattern that made me suddenly uneasy.

"Why would anyone here kill me?" I asked with a defiance that covered my unease. "I don't even know anyone here. As a matter of fact, the reason I came here was to—"

"But someone here knows you," Golfin said. "And that someone knew you were going to be here. The murder was—will be—carefully planned."

"Just how am I going to be murdered?" I asked, not grinning.

"The coroner's report says that you were—will be—poisoned," Golfin said.

I thought of the Tom Collins, and my stomach turned over.

"A venom," Golfin went on, "injected by means of a pin or needle. The coroner found—will find, that is—a small puncture in the small of your back on the right side, with some of the venom still imbedded, along with the paste."

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do," I said. "I'm getting out of here." I turned toward the door.

"Wait!" Sarah Fish said. "Mr. Golfin says it will happen when you try to leave."

My momentum left me as my hand touched the doorknob. It flowed out of me. I turned around and faced them.

"Just how do you know all this?"

I said, glaring at the little man.

"I suppose I had better tell you," he said. "I'm *Dr.* Golfin."

"Oh," I said.

**H**E reached into his breast pocket and extracted an expensive leather billfold. Looking quite important for his size, he took out a card and extended it to me. "

"My specialty is—has been," he said, "amnesiacs. I've made a life study of them."

I looked at the card. It gave the name, Dr. S. L. Golfin, and an address on Wabash, Chicago.

"The phenomenon of amnesia interested me," he went on. "A person suddenly can't remember anything. Perhaps years later memory returns, but there is a gap. Why?"

He smiled at me triumphantly. Sarah Fish nodded sagely.

"Because . . ." Golfin lifted his left arm with a flourish and inspected his watch. "One hour and three minutes," he said quietly. Then, "That was the question I asked myself. Why? Unfortunately amnesia is rather rare. The few genuine cases didn't give me enough opportunity to find the answer. I did, however, arrive at several theories about it. And finally I came to the conclusion that amnesia is part of a larger field. I expanded my research to include

other phenomena such as prophetic dreams. I was sure I was on the right track, but unfortunately it was impossible to study a person in the process of having a prophetic dream."

"I can see that," I said sympathetically.

"Exactly," Golfin said, blinking up at me. "However, I asked myself, 'Of the several theories, wouldn't the one that also accounts for prophetic dreams be the more probable one?' And of course it's well known that the more a theory explains, the more probable it is of being true."

"Not always," I ventured.

He pondered this, then looked at his watch again. "Fifty-three minutes," he said.

I swallowed.

"But how do amnesia and prophetic dreams tie together?" I asked.

"They are basically the same phenomenon," Golfin said, "with one important difference. In amnesia the conscious mind jumps over a period of time and stays there, going on in normal fashion. In prophetic dreams it does the same, *except that it returns to its starting point.*"

I glanced at Sarah Fish. She was listening intently. It occurred to me that she hadn't heard any of this before either. She was the congenial type. Undoubtedly when

Golfin had sprung this murder business on her she hadn't asked questions.

"Now do you see what I'm getting at?" Golfin said. "The mechanism must be the same in both instances. An underlying mechanism. In amnesia a person may suffer a brain injury, or a person may be under a terrific compulsion to escape the present. In either case the person jumps over a period of days or years in, seemingly, an instant—and refuses to return. In prophetic dreams the person jumps into the future to an instant when something crucial is taking place, and returns to the present with memory of it."

I looked at my own watch and said, "Any other time I would like to listen, but what are you driving at?"

HE frowned and glanced at his watch. "Forty-one minutes," he said. "This is what I'm driving at. If I could discover the mechanism by which the mind leaps into the future, and returns, I would have a means of doing that myself. I could, possibly, go to tomorrow and buy a newspaper and see what it says, and return to today with that knowledge."

"I see now!" Sarah Fish said, quivering with excitement. "That's how you learned that Mr. Smith is to be murdered!"

"So you did discover a way?" I said.

"I did. That's why I'm here. For some time now I have been going into the future at will, and also into the past. I've learned how to control it, the length of time I stay there, and just how far into the future or the past I go."

"It sounds good," I admitted. "How could you change things?"

He glanced at his watch worriedly. "We haven't much time," he said. "A little over half an hour. What I want to do is this. I have the instruments with me to send you into the future to the moment you are dying. I want you to go there and see if you don't know then who killed you, and how. You will return to the present moment with that knowledge, and be able to avoid death. At least—" He smiled encouragingly. "At least I hope you will."

"And if I don't?"

He shrugged. "This is my first serious attempt to change the past. Sooner or later I will succeed." He had reached into his breast pocket again. Now he brought out something like a fat fountain pen.

"I don't know," I said uneasily. "You sure this doesn't hurt?"

He unscrewed the end of the thing. There was a short hollow needle on it, with what looked like a trigger that had swung out into

position against the side.

"I've used it on myself many times," he said. He started toward me.

"Wait a minute," I said, backing up a step and holding up my hand. "This is going to take me up to the instant I'm dying?"

"That's right," he said, "and I want you to try, in that single instant you are there, to find out who did it. Think where you were when it happened, and who might have done it."

"You sure it won't kill me?" I asked.

He took another step toward me. "Of course not," he said.

"Wait a minute," I said, backing up against a bookcase to get away from him. "Why didn't you go farther ahead in time and read in the papers who did it? Wouldn't that have been the best way?"

For a brief instant his eyes flashed with what seemed to me to be madness. I thought of the three dollar bill. The guy was crazy. It had to be that. He'd been using the stuff on himself. Whatever it was it had affected his mind. He imagined he could send his mind into the future. Or maybe—

I remembered suddenly why I was here. I had followed Golfin in the hopes of getting one of those three dollar bills. That made it

a vicious circle. Sure. It was *he* who was going to murder me, if anyone was. Those other people didn't know me. And he said I was going to be poisoned by venom on a pin or needle—or *was it going to be a hypodermic needle?*

"Don't be afraid, Mr. Smith," Golfin purred. "It's the only hope of saving your life. Your murder was never solved."

"Oh, it is, is it?" I gritted. I snaked out with my hand and wrapped my fingers around the wrist of the hand that held the needle. "Give me that thing," I said.

He struggled. He had a lot of strength for a little man. He pivoted around and tried to pull his wrist free. With his other hand he tried to get hold of the needle. I kept shaking his wrist to keep him from doing it.

Then I remembered his expensive billfold. It probably had the three dollar bills in it. I simply reached into his breast pocket and appropriated it. He didn't know it was gone.

A second later, with a loud grunt, he twisted violently in a last effort to get free. I heard a sharp snap, and at the same time I felt a sharp pain stab into me.

It was in the small of my back on the right side. *The small of my back on the right side!*

I let go of his wrist. He was

just starting to jerk again, and my letting go made him stagger backwards and fall against the bookcase on the far wall. He didn't even know his gadget had gone off!

I did, though. And a strange fatalism was seeping into me, like the emotional effect of a drug. A numbness was beginning to make itself felt along my right side.

Sarah Fish was staring at me, her eyes large and round. Not like a fish though. Too human, too full of concern and sympathy. Maybe she had seen the needle stick me . . .

Funny . . . Golfin came here convinced in his own insane way that he was going to prevent a murder. If he hadn't come, I wouldn't have come either. And if he hadn't come, there wouldn't have been a corpse . . .

I LOOKED around until I found the door, and headed toward it. My right leg dragged a little as I walked. And I didn't need to go into the future to know what was going to happen. I would make it to the door. Sure. I would open it, and walk through the crowd outside toward the front door. Before I got there I would die. Golfin would never know, maybe, that it was his drug that had killed me. Sarah Fish, convinced by the way it happened

that Golfin had been right, would insist to the police that I was okay when I left her.

I could stop right where I was and die in this room. My hand gripped the doorknob and twisted, and the door opened. And I knew I wasn't going to stay in this room. I was going to try to get to the front door.

My whole right side was numb now. I had to walk slowly. Even then I wasn't sure of my next step. And with each step the massive front door seemed farther away.

*I wasn't going to make it.*

I bumped into someone — or someone bumped into me. I jerked my head around with a snarl starting on my lips. It was George Wile.

"Sorry old boy," he apologized. "I didn't see you."

I blinked at him, an idea forming. Maybe if I could change something — any little thing — I could save myself. What could I change? I didn't know, because I didn't know whether even the change I might make would be part of the future. Still . . .

"'Sall right, ol' boy," I said, bumping against him. And my hands moved fast. My own wallet went into his pocket, and his went into mine.

I stepped back, grinning. I had at least done something to confuse the issues. I would leave that

puzzle behind me. It wouldn't fool anyone though, because they would know who I was. Sarah Fish and Sam Golfin.

My heart was starting to pound painfully. Panic flooded into me. I had to reach that front door. I had to! It was already open, and people were going through it, leaving the party. The distinguished appearing man was standing there shaking hands with them as they left.

Where was I supposed to drop dead? I wished I had asked Golfin that. I took another step, and another. And, unbelieving, I was at the door.

"Glad you could be here," the distinguished appearing man said, gripping my hand and letting it go.

He had turned to the next person, and I was standing there, my heart pounding, expecting to drop. Somebody pushed against me gently and said, "Pardon me." I put my hand on the door frame and put one foot over the threshold. I was still standing.

I let go the door frame and put the other foot over the threshold. I was standing on the porch. I sucked in a breath. It was too good to be true. There was a catch to it somewhere. But—

I took another step. Eager haste possessed me. I took quick steps off the porch. I was on the side-

walk. I was still alive!

And somewhere I had lost the numbness in my side.

Around me people were getting in their cars, the doors slamming shut softly. I glanced over my shoulder. More people were coming out of the house.

I waited for no more. Almost running, I went the two blocks to the stop sign and turned toward the drugstore.

"Made it," I said under my voice as I pushed open the door and went in. I slid into the same seat I had occupied before. The same counter girl took my order for coffee. "Black this time," I said. "And where's my paper?"

My heart wasn't pounding any more. I was still shaky, but there wasn't a chance of my dying. Not a chance. I grinned to myself.

My coffee came. Also a paper. I sipped the coffee and tried to get interested in the paper. But I kept going back to what had happened.

Then I heard the sound of police sirens. They approached until they were just outside. I looked out and saw the police cars turn the corner, going in the direction of the house where I had been.

So someone had died after all!

I REACHED under my coat and touched the spot where the needle had struck me. It was a

little sore, but not enough to bother me.

Who had been killed? George Wile? Suddenly I remembered the exchange of wallets I had made. I reached into my hip pocket and took out his wallet.

I looked in the money compartment and saw I had enriched myself by twenty dollars. Grinning, I looked in another pocket of the wallet. There was a package of needles. My grin wiped off. They were ordinary sewing needles. But the pointed ends were covered with what seemed to be gray paint.

The counter girl was at the far end scrubbing the counter. The baldish cashier was on the other side of the store behind a counter, waiting on a man and a woman. I took Golfin's billfold and quickly thumbed through it.

There were several of the three dollar bills. There were two ones. And there were five twenty dollar bills. I shoved all the money into my pocket except one of the three dollar bills.

I made sure no one was looking my way, and dropped Golfin's billfold on the floor, kicking it under the counter behind me in the center aisle where it wouldn't be found unless the janitor swept under there. I decided to do the same with Wile's. After all, if Sam Golfin were right, and there was a murder, I didn't want a couple of

strange wallets on me. Nor those coated needles.

I looked at the three dollar bill in my hand. It was like that other one. Picture of Truman on it, atomic mushroom on the other side, with the atom superimposed. I squinted at the fine print. *Series of 1958.*

That made me frown. Why would someone bother to change the date on phony money? And it was too nice a job of engraving for such a thing too.

I thought of one of the tests for good money. I rubbed the three dollar bill against the margin of the newspaper. Some of the ink came off.

The wild theory Golfin had fed me was tame compared to what I was beginning to suspect. I took out the rest of his money and picked out a twenty dollar bill. Putting the rest back in my pocket, I studied the twenty. I rubbed it against the margin of the newspaper. Ink came off. It was genuine money.

Taking a deep breath, I squinted at the fine print. *Series of 1964.*

I looked at the rest of the money I had taken from Golfin. The two ones were okay. All the rest had dates in the future. I knew money. I could spot a phony bill a block away. It was real money.

Either a master counterfeiter had—Another thought struck me.

I compared the serial numbers of the bills. All different. That clinched it. They weren't phony.

That meant that Golfin was *actually from the future himself.* Then why had he given me and Sarah Fish that story about prophetic dreams and amnesia? I thought about that a bit and nodded to myself. He wanted to give us something we could believe. We wouldn't have believed a raw statement that he was from the future. Those three dollar bills . . .

**T**HE more I thought about them the less they seemed like a gag. I tried to recall every detail of Golfin's passing it when he bought his cigarettes. He hadn't done it like he was pulling a gag. He had taken his change and walked out. He didn't know he had done anything wrong. He had assumed a three dollar bill was used here—or now, rather.

My coffee was cold. The girl was looking at me as if she wanted to close up. I smiled at her and tossed a quarter on the counter and went out on the sidewalk.

I debated what to do. Should I forget the whole thing? Or should I take a walk back to Sarah Fish's house and see what was going on? I decided on the latter.

Her house was dark. No police cars were there. That was not what I had expected. With a mur-

der, there should be police cars, and the place should be lit up. Or maybe not. It had been an hour since I left the place.

I went back to the drugstore and caught the bus down to the Davis Street El station. Riding on the elevated it occurred to me that maybe I'd better not go to my apartment. If the police had gotten my wallet from George Wile they might be waiting for me.

I decided to rent a room for the night and wait until morning. Then I changed my mind. If I went back to my room I could claim Wile had picked *my* pocket. If the police were looking for me they would eventually get me anyway, since I already had a record of three arrests for this and that.

I sighed and relaxed, and after a while the train dipped down into the subway, and I got off and had a late snack at the corner cafeteria.

It was almost midnight when I climbed the stairs to my apartment. When I opened the door the phone was ringing. I turned on the light and closed the door, and answered it.

"Ben Smith?" a strange voice said. "This is George Wile."

"Oh," I said. I did some quick thinking. "Oh!" I said in a different tone. "I remember you. How'd you know my number. Did you find my wallet? That must be

it. I lost it. Thanks a lot for calling me about it. I'll meet you tomorrow and get it back."

"It was in my pocket," he said coldly. "And my own was missing. I want it back."

"Yours was missing?" I said. "Hey, wait a minute. If you think I got it you're crazy. Somebody played a trick on us. There must have been a pickpocket at Sarah Fish's tonight."

"There was," he said coldly. "You. I took the trouble of calling the police and found out. I want my wallet and I want it tonight."

"I don't have it. No kidding." I said worriedly. "I'm handing you the straight goods. By the way, what happened after I left? I heard the police sirens."

"Someone had called them and said there was a murder. They were pretty sore about it."

"And there wasn't? Ha Ha?" I said.

"Quit stalling, Smith," Wile said. "I want my wallet back. And everything in it."

"Haven't got it," I said.

A long sigh came over the phone. "All right," Wile said. "I sort of expected this. I'll give you five hundred dollars for it."

I took the phone from my face and stared at it, thinking. Talking sounds came from the receiver. I put it back to my ear and said,

"Come again? I didn't hear you."

"You heard me all right," Wile said. "Okay, I can get you two thousand dollars from the bank tomorrow. Meet me at eleven o'clock at State and Washington, northeast corner."

"Okay," I said. "Be sure and bring me *my* wallet."

"I will," he said smoothly. His tone became worried. "Is my wallet in a *safe place*?"

"Sure," I said, thinking of the spot under the counter where I had slid it with my foot. "You don't need to worry about it at all."

The line was dead. I realized suddenly that he had trapped me into an admission that I had his wallet.

**T**HIS wasn't the same as a little light finger work on a crowded train, or getting a rubber check chased, or any of the many things I did when the opportunity arose, to pay my rent. Wile didn't just want these poison needles back. He was planning to kill me to keep me quiet. But he wanted the needles and his wallet back too. First.

I thought of Golfin and his reading in the papers that I had been murdered, and it wasn't funny. I locked the door and wedged a chair under the knob. Wile now knew for sure I was the one who had his wallet. He could be on his

way down to kill me right now.

I started packing.

It wasn't until I was almost packed that I suddenly became aware of someone standing behind me. I jerked around in alarm. It was Sam Golfin.

"How'd you get in here?" I blurted out.

"I've been waiting here ever since tomorrow," he said. "I had to see you."

I grinned at him thinly. "I didn't get murdered at Sarah's after all," I remarked dryly.

"No, thank God," Golfin said. "It proves that the past *can* be changed. I'd hoped it could." He frowned. "But unfortunately in preventing your murder at Sarah's a new future came into existence. I have to do it all over again."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Tomorrow when I came to see you, you were in here—dead. The door was unlocked. That's how I got in."

"Oh fine!" I snorted. "See what I'm doing? I'm packing. In another five minutes I'll be on my way to parts unknown."

"I only wish that were true," Golfin said sadly.

"Look," I said. "I wish you'd get out and leave me alone. You want to know why I almost got killed last night?"

"Yes, I do," Golfin said. "That's

something the police couldn't find out—in that other future, I mean."

"I'll tell you," I said. "I didn't know anything about Sarah Fish's place. I probably would never have gone there except for you. You bought a pack of cigarettes in the drugstore. Remember?"

Golfin blinked his eyes, then nodded.

"You paid for them with a three dollar bill."

"What is wrong with that?" Golfin asked.

"Nothing," I said slowly, "except that there aren't any three dollar bills."

"Oh dear me," Golfin said. "Of course there aren't. It completely slipped my mind!"

"I wanted one of those three dollar bills," I said. "The druggist wouldn't let me have the one you left, so I went to Sarah Fish's place to find you and get one."

A knock sounded at the door.

"It's the man who's going to kill you," Sam said.

"And there isn't any other way out of here," I said. "How you going to get me out of this one?"

"I don't know," he mused. He looked from me to the door, his eyes thoughtful. "I'm beginning to see something," he said. "It's very interesting. So you went to the Fish residence because of me. Hmm. I wonder . . . It doesn't seem possible, but . . ."

"What doesn't seem possible?" I asked.

He smiled apologetically. "There really isn't anything that can be done about that man in the hall." The knocking was repeated, more loudly. "And this future is quite hopeless for you . . ."

Whoever was in the hall was trying some kind of key in the lock.

"If I owned a gun it wouldn't be," I said, watching the door bend in under pressure from outside.

"If you only knew who it was!" Golfin groaned.

"But I do!" I said.

"You said at Sarah's that you didn't," Golfin snapped.

"I didn't, then," I said. Quickly I told him about George Wile and the package of poisoned needles. "He's obviously planning on murdering someone. Maybe at Sarah's last night," I concluded hastily, my eye on the door. "My switching wallets with him stopped that. Now he's got to kill me before he can go ahead with this other murder, or I could put the finger on him."

"Why - didn't - you - say - so - before?" Golfin said, glaring at me with annoyance.

The door splintered a little, the noise sounding like a shot. I took my eyes off Golfin to look, and when I looked back Golfin was darting at me, his hypodermic gadget in his hand and what looked

like murder in his eye.

I TRIED to grab his wrist. This time he was too fast for me. He evaded my clutch and was behind me before I could turn. I felt a sharp pain stab at the base of my skull. I started to turn. The room blurred as a wave of dizziness swept over me . . .

"Here's your coffee, sir."

I looked at the girl behind the counter, then down at my newspaper. "Thanks," I said. My stomach felt funny. I felt just like a guy I knew once who had a premonition he was going to die. Heartburn, I decided hastily. But I felt nervous.

I took a sip of the hot coffee and tried to concentrate on the paper. Then I became aware of the little man. I felt instantly I had seen him someplace before, but I couldn't place him.

"A package of Camels," he said to the cashier.

"That will be twenty cents," the baldish cashier said.

The little man handed him a bill he had been holding in his hand. "By the way," he said smoothly as the cashier glanced at it, "could you tell me the way to Sarah Fish's residence?"

The little man glanced at me out of the corner of his eye. He seemed to know me, but gave no sign of recognition. The cashier was

giving him directions. I was listening, but I was trying to puzzle out the strange feeling that I had been through all this before. And it wasn't until the little man had left that it seeped into my consciousness that something was queer about that bill.

"Hey!" I said to the cashier. "What kind of bill did that little guy give you?"

"Why, a - a - Oh good Lord."

We examined it together. It was a three dollar bill. And instead of surprise, I felt the jaws of a trap closing in on me. I listened to the cashier babble about playing gags on his friends with it. A part of me wanted to turn my back on the whole thing and forget it.

But some force pulled me in the direction the little man had gone. As I walked I relaxed. I shrugged off the strange feeling I had. I told myself I didn't believe in premonitions.

A party of some sort was in full swing at the Sarah Fish place. I nodded to myself. I could go in and mix with the crowd. I could pick this little man's pocket. Maybe a few more. The worst that could happen would be that they wouldn't let me in.

Beside the huge door was a button. I pressed it and heard a series of chimes ring out. A few seconds later the door swung open

and a middle aged man with a jovial expression said, "Come in, come in. I'm George Wile. Sarah's somewhere. What's your name? Sorry I can't keep track of all Sarah's friends."

"Ben Smith," I said, stepping inside.

"Sarah'll show up in a minute," George Wile said, and promptly forgot me. That was okay by me. I had taken an instant dislike to him.

I stood near the door looking around, trying to spot the little man. A gorgeous young thing held a tray in front of my face until I took a tall glass that contained, I discovered, an excellent Tom Collins.

Suddenly I saw the little man. He was at the edge of the group surrounding a distinguished appearing man who was talking. I edged over near the crowd and sized things up. It would be a cinch.

I crowded against the little man, then jerked as though someone had shoved me. At the same time my free hand snaked in and got his wallet.

"Sorry," I murmured. "Someone pushed me."

The little man looked up at me and smiled. And I had a strange feeling that he had been expecting it. I could have sworn he even knew I had his wallet, and

was laughing at me.

There was one obvious answer. He was a cop and he knew me. He'd take his time and get me with the goods. He didn't look like a cop but—

I looked for him and he had disappeared.

I tried to locate him, meanwhile sipping my Collins as though I belonged here. Then I did something I always do unconsciously as a matter of habit. I felt in my hip pocket to make sure my own wallet hadn't been stolen by some other pickpocket. It was gone!

So that was it! The little man was a pickpocket. I thought I had seen him someplace before! I grinned suddenly, wondering if he had really missed his billfold yet.

I KEPT looking for him. Then things happened fast. I saw the little man sliding away from the man who had let me into the house. George Wile. I took a step after the little man. My eyes jerked back to George when he uttered a scream and clutched at his back. He fell forward, his arms and legs jerking.

I pulled my eyes away, searching for the little man. A crowd was rushing around George Wile. I heard someone - a woman - scream, "My God! He's dead!"

I saw the little man at the front door. He slipped out as I

pushed through the crowd toward him. I went as fast as I dared. When I reached the sidewalk I saw him running toward the drug-store.

I ran after him, gaining rapidly. He looked over his shoulder and saw me. Then—

He just vanished. Right in front of my eyes. He couldn't have darted off the walk into the bushes.

I stopped, not believing my eyes, and started searching the lawns carefully. A couple of minutes later I heard sirens coming toward this part of town.

I hid between two houses and watched the police cars pull up in front of Sarah Fish's place. Then I went to the bus line.

A few hours later, after a lot of riding around town I climbed up to the sidewalk from the subway. A night extra was being shouted.

"Big murdah in Evanston!"

And I knew before I read the paper that it would give my name as the murdered man. Premonition. I was beginning to believe in it now.

I went to an all night cafe and ordered a hamburger plate and read the paper. They had identified the victim by the wallet they found on him. My wallet, of course. And that meant that the little man had planted it on him and then killed him. With a poisoned needle the papers said.

Why?

I gave up trying to figure it out after a while and went to my apartment. I had made up my mind to get out of town. They might find out the victim's real identity, and then they would come looking for me to find out why my wallet was on him.

I locked the door and began packing clothes into a suitcase. I became aware after a while of someone standing behind me. I jerked around in alarm. It was the little man.

"You!" I blurted. "How'd you get in here?" I doubled a fist and started toward him. He had killed a man and planted my wallet on the corpse.

Then, suddenly, a queer distortion blanketed my mind. I had a strange conviction that things were happening just the way they had happened before—many times before—only not at different times, but this very instant.

Abruptly, like a veil drawing away from a window, the distortion vanished. With preternatural clarity everything that had happened flooded into memory.

"Good!" Golfin said. "I see the time-lines have emerged as true memories. And this time I saved your life."

"You think so?" I snarled. "The police will be after me by morning. They'll pin the murder on me—

the murder *you* committed."

He was shaking his head. "I didn't kill George Wile. Let me explain what happened. But go on with your packing. I can talk while you work."

I nodded.

"In the first time-line," Golfin said, "the one I started out to investigate, you were actually killed. I know now how it happened. You see, Sarah Fish is a blackmailer. George Wile was one of her victims. To get out of her clutches he had planned on killing her. It was a perfect setup for him. Several of her blackmail victims were there. All he had to do was stick her with the poisoned needle and sit back. Nothing could be pinned on him. Motive? A dozen of those present had equal motives.

"But you were there. A pickpocket. You lifted his wallet. He wouldn't have felt your light touch ordinarily, but he was acutely conscious of those spare poisoned needles. He had one in his fingers. Within a few moments Sarah would have been killed. You changed things. He killed you instead, and in the excitement stole back his wallet. And of course he didn't go through with his original plan to kill Sarah Fish. And also of course, the police never solved your murder. That's why I chose it in my first attempt to change the past. It was an ideal

mystery. I could solve it and at the same time save your life.

"I went into the past and watched your every move. But George Wile was too smart. Even watching I couldn't find out who had done it. So I went back into the past again and began my great experiment, *an attempt to alter what has already happened*.

"I succeeded—but not the way I had hoped. There is an inertia to events. That inertia in events made you steal his wallet the second time—and plant your own on him. You left before he discovered the switch. He came after you to kill you here. It was then you gave me the identity of your killer. After that I went back to my original point again. At the proper time I did what you had done. I picked George Wile's pocket. He felt me do it. Again—the inertia of events—he tried to stick me with the poisoned needle. But I was ready for him. I deflected his hand and shoved. He stuck himself."

**G**OLFIN grinned. "Sure I planted your wallet on him. But who can say whether it was my own free will or the inertia of events that made me do it? The morning papers will carry the story exactly the same as it was in the first time-line. A tremendous inertia of a single event."

"But what about me?" I said wildly. "The police will check. They'll know he isn't me."

Golfin shrugged. "I doubt it," he said. "My guess is that Sarah will identify him as you and keep quiet. To protect her racket, George will be buried as Ben Smith. George Wile's relatives will report him missing. He'll never be found. 'Your' murder will remain unsolved."

"I'm getting out anyway," I said. "I don't want to chance it."

"Then why not come with me?" Golfin said. "Now that I know I can change the past I'm going to start doing it in earnest."

"Go with you?" I said.

"You could work for me," Golfin said persuasively. "I would pay you far more than you average picking pockets, and it would be far more exciting work."

"Say . . ." I said thoughtfully. "That's not a bad idea. I guess I owe you something, too, for saving my life." I nodded. "Okay. But where do we go?"

"Not where," Sam Golfin said. "To when. We're going to my present—a future year not too far removed from 1954."

He took out his hypodermic gadget and came toward me. I retreated a step, then stood still, the palms of my hands suddenly wet with perspiration.

"Good boy," he said. "It won't hurt much."

\* \* \*

I went into the drugstore and up to the cigar counter. "A pack of Camels," I said to the cashier. I took out a three dollar bill and handed it to him as he slid the pack toward me.

"Fifty cents out of three dollars," he said absently.

I nodded, thinking of the first time I had seen a three dollar bill.

That was a long time ago, as time goes. Back in fifty-four. I was a pickpocket then, in case you want to know. Now—I'm working for Sam Golfin.

Investigations. Any place, any Time.

**IN THE FEBRUARY ISSUE:—**

## **PLANET OF DREAD**

*By*

**DWIGHT V. SWAIN**

A great new novel by one of IMAGINATION'S most popular writers. Don't miss this thrilling interplanetary adventure in the Burroughs tradition!

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## ★ Polarized Navigation ★

BIOLOGISTS today are adding an interesting note to Arctic flight navigation, by suggesting that the navigators study some of Nature's navigation secrets! It seems that Nature has built into certain insects and some types of crabs, a set of eyes capable of distinguishing polarized light. Since light is polarized in definite directions, such an eye is able to permit the lowliest of creatures to orient itself and know where it is!

As a result, scientists are trying to duplicate a navigating device (with guided missiles in mind) to function on polarized light, to know its position independent of the magnetic field, and sensitive to only the feeblest of light.

It won't be the first time that science has discovered that Nature anticipated a good many scientific ideas long before Men. Remember how bats locate themselves? —supersonics!



"Nothing for me, but the young lady would like a side order of chlorophyl capsules."

# "Leave, Earthmen — Or Die!"

*By*

*John Massie Davis*

**Murph, Forsyth, and Jamison heard the alien voice warn them. And to each it sounded familiar — a sweetheart, a son, a hated enemy!**

In a dwindling spiral they circled the planet, and Murph's cold blue eyes studied the radarscreen. Things looked good: no sign of cities, social denizens or humanoids. He was scribbling notes on his desk when the all-wave above him started crackling.

He watched the green line sweep back and forth along the dial, finally centering on the wave length which was broadcasting. As it focused, the speaker sputtered in.

" . . . in accordance with Interstellar Code," it sounded like a recording, ". . . we repeat. Landings and colonizing efforts have been previously attempted upon this planet. They are not welcome and have not been successful. Change course and seek other areas. This warning is being broadcast upon wavelengths available to you and in language translatable

by you in accordance with Interstellar Code . . ." Murphy switched it off and looked at his crew of two.

"Well?"

Forsyth grinned at him. "The hell with them! We've heard that from every race in the solar system—one way or another. I say we land."

Jamison shrugged. "Put 'er down anywhere. Makes no difference to me." His scarred lips tightened.

"Okay," Murph switched the set back on. The same record was playing, monotonously.

"Load up with combat equipment, boys. We're going in."

The deadly silver needle tightened the spiral course around the planet, and above Murph the speaker crackled again and went dead.



"Guess they got tired of playing that record," he muttered.

Another crackling and the mechanism blared again.

" . . . we see you intend disregarding our warning. In accordance with Interstellar Code, it is only fair to warn you . . ." It clicked off abruptly as Murph jabbed at the switch. No use listening to this outworld nonsense—he'd heard it all before and lived through it.

"Where's the rest of the fleet?" He threw the question out generally.

"Nine hours behind," Jamison said. "We blast in. They follow us." The three men were silent as they scanned the radar screen. They whined above a land mass and Murph juggled the controls and the ship swooped upward, then settled slowly, riding on the jets. While they waited for the ground around them to cool, the men climbed into combat gear. The radar scanned the military hemisphere available and Murph casually flipped the radio switch again.

" . . . have disregarded our warning," the voice said, insistently. "In accordance with the Interstellar Code, we can not now be further responsible . . ." It croaked into silence as Murph slammed the switch closed again.

"Nuts!" he said, buckling a belt around his waist.

"Yeah," said Jamison. "The hell with them—*whoever* they are."

"Well," said Forsyth—he was the navigator, "now, I'm not so sure . . ."

"Get dressed," Murph was in command, and he showed it. "We are going out."

. . . There was an oddity about the voice, Murph thought, as he dressed. The voice reminded him of his sweetheart, Sitra, back in Philly on earth: husky, throaty—and with the soft, vibrant purr of a happy kitten.

. . . It reminded Forsyth of his son's tones, during the family farewell for this expedition. A twinge of concern tautened his body as he remembered: one never knew when—or if—crews returned from these grim expansion campaigns of humanity.

. . . Jamison had another impression. He remembered his days as a professional fighter and that last, rough brawl when he hadn't quite made champion. It still rankled. The voice was that of his opponent, in the seventh round—just when Jamison's knees started to buckle. The sly, calculated insults in the clinches, intended to make him lose his head. They had accomplished their purpose. He had charged in slugging,

when he should have hung on—or run backward until his wind returned. From then on he became a has-been, working steadily downward, until the manpower needs of humanity had offered an opportunity to pick another career. His scarred lips, remembering, were a tight line and his eyes cold and uncompromising.

**T**HHEY'D finished dressing. Murph flipped on the radio again, grinning in contempt. The voice still vibrated through the ether.

"... that you blast off immediately or assume responsibility for the consequences. Interstellar Code states that invaded peoples are justified in using any tactics ..." It clicked off. Murph had been annoyed by the resemblance to Sitra's voice: perhaps he was homesick. Jamison's lips vanished into a white line and Forsyth looked around, rabbit-eyed with astonishment, expecting to see his son emerge from the piles of supplies and equipment. Self-conscious, none of them said anything.

"Okay," said Murph, "Out we go."

The precision door swung open quietly and the three descended to the still-smoking ground. Each set up his rapid fire electrogun, covering the entrance and then they sat back, waiting. Nothing happened,

and Murph broke the tense silence.

"Turn on the radio," he looked at Forsyth. "We can hear it from here. I'll man both guns."

Forsyth grunted and vanished into the ship. Murph heard the crackle as equipment warmed up, and listened to the voice of Sitra. Oddly enough, Jamison tensed as he heard the voice of the present champion, and Forsyth nearly cried as his son's tones came through the metallic speaker. But all the voices said the same thing.

"... subject to unprincipled attack to resist invasion of our homeland. This is the last time this warning will be broadcast." The receiver clicked, then dropped into the monotonous hum of a radio on an unused but still alert wavelength.

Forsyth returned and the three men sat, each back of an electrogun, alert eyes scanning the alien landscape. From over a slight rise a mile off, a figure approached the ship. Murph blinked, doubting his senses, confused, then his roar broke the silence of the strange world.

"Sitra!" Just one word, but that's all he could do. She looked as she had when he'd left on this expedition, when they had said goodbye. Sparkling with sequins in her dressing room, undulating with feathers in the right places,

she walked toward him with the feline grace he'd learned to love.

"Sitra!" he shouted again. Astonished, he deserted his position behind the gun and started running across the plain. Gracefully, daintily, encountering difficulties because of her spiked heels on the rough terrain, she smiled bravely and hurried toward him.

Forsyth saw the approaching figure too. He tensed with disbelief and surprise and then his voice rose excitedly.

"Jimmy, Jimmy!" What was his boy doing *here*? Reason faded as he watched his nine-year-old son stumbling toward the ship. He unfastened his harness and slipped from behind the gun: *his* boy on an alien planet, confronting unknown dangers! He must—*must*—get him back to the ship and the little ring of certainty behind the guns. Forsyth started across the level space, grateful that the towering hulk of Murph had recognized his boy and would, on this unknown world, help bring the kid back to comparative safety. In six hours, now, the fleet would be here. The boy could be sent home on one of the capital ships . . .

**B**EHIND him Jamison watched the two figures running away. His face froze into granite. Rage and resentment surged within him.

Across the plain he saw the man who had stolen, yes, *stolen*, the championship from him. The fighter loped toward him casually, sneering and confident. Jamison felt a surge like an electric shock across his shoulders. His teeth ground together and he could hear their roaring within his ears. Deliberately he moved from behind his gun, started at a fighter's dog trot toward his opponent. It occurred to him that Murph and Forsyth would beat him there. He was glad they were willing to help, but for the sake of his own integrity he considered this *his* fight.

Jamison ran swiftly then. He passed Forsyth and Murph, determined to be the first to reach the one man he hated. He sprinted eagerly, sucking the strange air chemicals of this world into his lungs. He was short of breath. Behind him he heard the heavy thudding of Murph plunging and plowing toward him, and in addition, the light but rapid steps of Forsyth. By now he didn't care. He was confronting his opponent.

Dropping into a crouch, Jamison moved in. Feet wide, tense; there would be no mistake, no error, this time. His fist lashed out and his opponent fell on the strange and powdery dust of a strange world millions of miles from their first fight.

The man started struggling up—and again flat-footed, tense, fists like crunching sledge hammers, Jamison dove at him.

And then it happened. Murph hit Jamison from the side. Raw and choking with rage, Murph clubbed, groped, kicked, fouled, until the ex-fighter fell in the pale and strange dust. Murph's voice was hoarse and shaking:

"Hit my woman, will you!" he screamed in rage.

Jamison tried to rally, but each time he moved Murph's fists slammed against his face and head.

There was a final crash as the back of his head struck against the rocks on the ground. Jamison lay in the dust on an alien planet and from behind his right ear gray and reddish matter oozed. He didn't move.

Murph stood up. He looked again at Sitra. He was choked and tired, standing there, and as he grasped for breath, Forsyth ran by him, ran up to her. Angrily he watched. Forsyth running up to *his* woman! What was wrong with these men? Murph saw Forsyth put his arms around Sitra, and say—meaninglessly to Murph—"Jimmy, Jimmy!"

Again a red rage filled Murph. He dove forward, smashed into Forsyth, and the navigator reeled backwards. As he fell back, his

feet tangled in the scrubby vegetation of the planet, he reached toward his belt and his electro-gun jerked free from the holster. He saw the bull shape of Murph over him, an enraged beast, and as he fell, the twin electrodes shot out an energy stream. Fear and hatred tensed his nerves, but despite the emotion, he set the range right. The sparks arced together just in front of the great bulk of Murph. There was a crackling and the smell of burning flesh, then a surprised look upon Murph's face. The surprise turned to rage and the last thing Forsyth saw was Murph falling down on him, his clothes and his chest burned away until the ribs showed, animal rage welling from his lips.

A figure stood fifty feet away and watched this drama. Murph, blood coughing from his mouth and nose, the great muscles of his chest nothing but crisp burned meat, reached for Forsyth, picked him up, holding him over his head as an ape would a man, and slammed him again and again to the ground.

The final time Murph tried to lift Forsyth, his strength gave out. He dropped Forsyth's limp form, coughed in a final paroxysm, and fell beside Forsyth and Jamison.

The figure which stood fifty feet away turned and walked leisurely

back over the rise.

Now, it was not a fighter, and it was not Jimmy, and it was not Sitra. It was a denizen of the planet and it looked like no human.

Shortly thereafter the all-wave radio in the deadly, powerful silvery needle standing serenely on the strange world blared again.

" . . . in accordance with Interstellar Code we have asked that we not be invaded and are warning you that according to Article 19, Section 3, fleets which invade a peaceful people become subject to unprincipled attack, even to the use of psychological weapons."

FIVE hours away the main fleet streaked toward the planet.

The Admiral looked at the tape reports from the scout ship and at transcripts of the recorded warning.

"Nuts!" he said. "We go in."

He felt an odd, intuitive twinge. The voice was so much like his mother's—and she hadn't been well when he'd last seen her. Beside him the Radioman busily, tersely, sent out landing instructions. He felt irritable: the voice had sounded just like Peggy—that no-good, cheating! . . . He shrugged: just imagination.

In a diminishing spiral, the fleet swung around the planet while the Admiral scanned the screen for a free landing site.

THE END



## *The Betrayers*



THE history of science is studed with a brilliant galaxy of names and dates, impressive and awe-inspiring when measured in terms of how they have affected the common everyday world of every human being on Earth. It is rare indeed to find history besmirching the name of any great scientist. It took the present to do that and it may be that the year 1950 may be called "the year of the Betrayal" or the "year of Triumph" depending on whether you are a citizen of the free world or that shrouded in the Iron Curtain.

Klaus Fuchs, Bruno Pontecorvo, Allan Nunn May and David Greenglass are four names to conjure with. If any of these men are familiar with the "Divine Comedy" of Dante, they must know that they have committed what the great Italian poet regarded as the ultimate of human crimes and for which he reserved the lowest levels in his Hell. The betrayal of compatriots and country is a crime without comparison, no matter what rationalizations are made to excuse it.

These four men, particularly

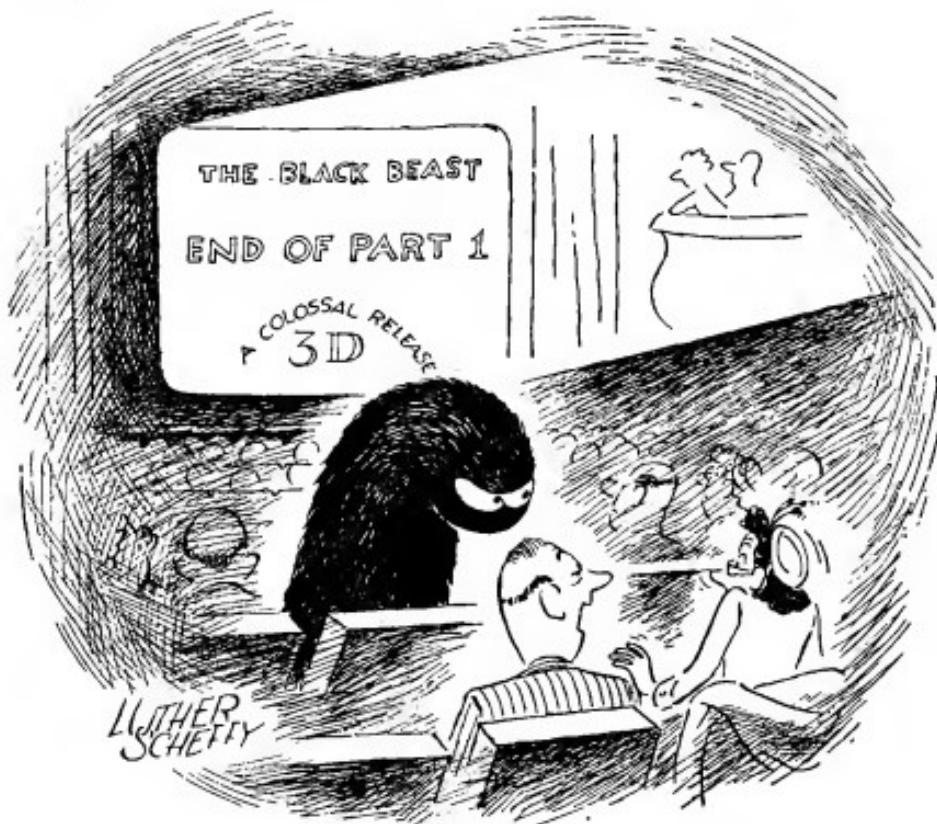
though Klaus Fuchs, literally shovelled the atomic energy program of the Soviets two or more years ahead of its schedule, and if ever the day comes when the atomic and hydrogen bombs start hurtling down on American cities, we may thank in a good part the work of these traitors.

What makes Fuchs' crime doubly heinous is the fact that he betrayed a country which sheltered him from the Nazis and offered him honor

and freedom. When Fuchs dies the Devil will really set the cauldrons bubbling!

Those who argue that science is free and unfettered, chained to no national allegiances are correct only in the most idealistic way, for the Soviets know that science is the key to the mastery of the future, and that the masters of science control the world! Scientists must choose sides and abide by that choice!

\* \* \*



"Oh, nonsense! It's intermission!"

# To Sup With The Devil

By

*Myron I. Scholnick*

**Henry and George were spending a friendly evening together, talking pleasantly over their wine glasses — about a very unpleasant subject!**

THE two men sat across from each other in soft leather chairs. Flames from the fireplace before them licked upward and shadows danced on walls and ceiling. The corners were in complete darkness.

"I say, George, this wine is exceedingly good," one of the men poured rich red liquid from a large decanter into his goblet.

"Yes, Henry, it's quite good. Much better than brandy," answered George, swallowing hard and rolling his head.

"Yes, yes," said Henry, sighing deeply, his lips and chin stained from the beverage. "Yes. Yes. Nothing like good wine. Nothing like it."

"As I was saying," smiled George.

"Oh yes," Henry nodded, setting his goblet on the table and

leaning forward in his seat. "Do continue with your story. You were telling me about how you met the Devil last week, and had an interesting chat with him." He winked mischievously.

George shook his head vigorously. "And I most certainly did. Yes. Met the Devil and had an enjoyable chat. He's a splendid chap, you know. Not at all like those pictures you see of him. No horns or red monkey outfit. He dresses most conservatively; wears a black suit. And he has nice gray hair." George patted his head. "Nice gray hair."

Henry poured himself another cup of wine and sipped it slowly. "But what did you talk about? I mean you have nothing in common at all."

"Oh no?" George shrugged. "But we do. We have much in

common. I admire the Devil and told him so. And he said that he would be glad to have me come and work for him."

"Work for him?"

"Yes. He wants me to go with him to his headquarters."

"But his headquarters are in . . . a . . . well you know."

"I know, but I still want to go. He said he would make me a demon or a ghoul or something."

"Horrid, don't you think?"

"No, not at all." George gulped down the last of his wine. "Quite pleasant if I may say so. Quite a change from the market and speculation and," he snorted loudly, "those damn commodities that I lost so heavily on yesterday. No, I think I'd enjoy seeing things as a demon or a ghoul or something."

"What do you see?"

"Oh you know. Graveyards, coffins and corpses . . ."

Henry laughed. "Oh, that's amusing. Most amusing."

George smiled tightly. "And you see the dead in Hell, the fire and brimstone, and you hear their cries of anguish and it's quite pleasant."

"Then why don't you go with the Devil and be done with it?"

"But I am going to go, Henry."

"Then go!"

"But I must do something first.

It's a sort of qualification."

"Yes?"

"I must kill someone."

"But that's most naughty, old boy, isn't it?"

"Not when you have a good reason."

HENRY held up the decanter and looked at the small amount of wine that was left. He shook his head sadly. "But who's going to be your victim?"

"You," answered George.

"Me?" said Henry, smiling.

"Yes, you."

"Are you mad?"

"No."

Henry stopped smiling and his face grew a trifle pale. He suddenly had the sickening feeling that George wasn't kidding him any more. "But why me?"

George pulled a small revolver from his breast pocket. "I have it from what I believe to be a thoroughly reliable source that while I was out of town last week you were out with my wife."

Henry's jaw dropped. "Why that's absurd!"

George pulled back the safety catch on his gun. "I heard you were out with my wife in a parked car on a dark and lonely road. I heard you were doing things with my wife in a parked car on a dark and lonely road."

Sweat glistened on Henry's forehead. "Me out with your wife? That's preposterous! And you know it! Now put down that gun! Do you hear me? Put it down!"

"No, I don't hear you," smiled George, pulling the trigger. "I don't hear you at all."

A small hole appeared between Henry's eyes and he slipped from his chair to the floor. What was left of his goblet of wine spilled on his shirt front.

George looked at his dead friend for a moment then pocketed his gun. "How did I do?" he called out to a dark corner of the room.

A tall, heavy-set man in a black suit stepped out of the darkness, walking towards the fireplace. His silver hair sparkled in the dancing light. "Fine, my friend, fine."

George sighed contentedly. "And now you'll let me go with you?"

"Now I'll let you come with me to Hell," said the Devil. "And I'll make you a demon or a ghoul," he grinned, "or something."

George was breathing heavily and the nostrils of his thin nose were quivering. "Well, what are we

waiting for? Let's go!"

The Devil smiled. "There is no hurry my friend. Calm yourself. Here, let us drink some wine." He picked up the decanter and poured what was left into two cups. He handed one to George.

"To our future," said the Devil, drinking quickly.

"To our future," said George, sipping the wine, looking a bit perplexed.

The Devil's eyes bored into George. "What is wrong, my friend? You look puzzled."

"Well, I was just wondering," said George. "You know, just aimlessly wondering."

"What about?" asked the Devil.

"Well, I guess I shouldn't ask, but . . . but Henry was such a good friend . . . are you positive that you saw my wife with him in that parked car last week?"

The devil shrugged, a shrewd grin pulling at his lips. "I could be wrong about that. You'd never forgive yourself, would you? Wouldn't that be Hell!"

And George, realizing suddenly for the first time that it was, screamed long and—heatedly.

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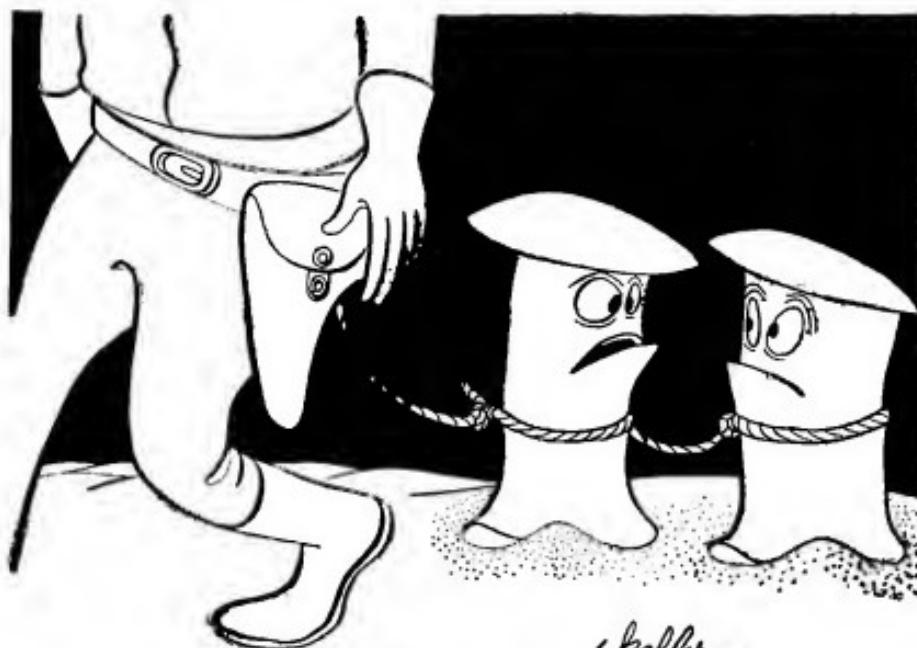
## \* Core Of The Matter! \*

THE interior of an atom is a fantastic world. The familiar laws of force which we know do not hold. Gravitation is non-existent, and electrical and magnetic forces seem feeble.

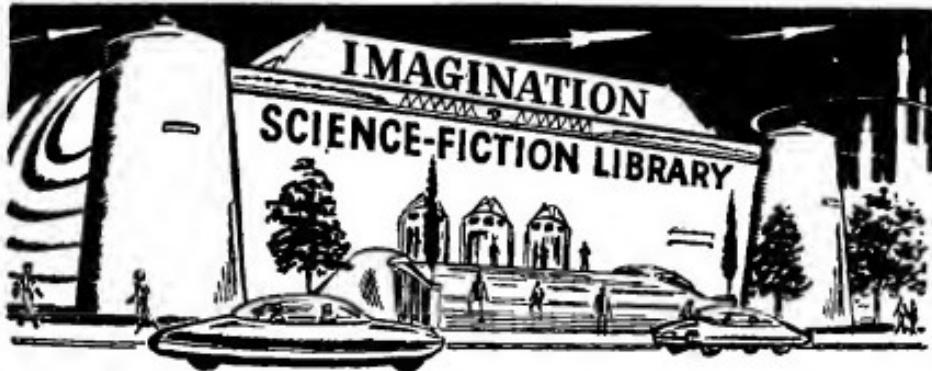
High speed particles are shot into the nucleus of the atom. Perhaps theoretically the atom should shatter; instead a new kind of atom is produced. On the other hand a relatively feeble energetic particle enters the nucleus, and the atom shatters!

Paradoxes like these leave physicists wondering if a new logic applies to the atom. Enormous amounts of information have been gleaned. But nobody seems able to put them together into a unified scheme of things. Quantum theory, and wave mechanics, offer no answers either.

The more science studies the nucleus of the atom, the more it appears as if it is trying to learn how a watch works by taking it apart with a baseball bat!



"It seems that we're a couple of alien life forms—whatever the hell that is!"



## — REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

*Conducted by Mark Reinsberg*

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month **IMAGINATION** will review several titles — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

### AHEAD OF TIME

by Henry Kuttner. 177 pages, \$2.00 paperbound, \$35. Ballantine Books, New York.

In one of his previous story collections published under the Lewis Padgett pen-name, *Robots Have No Tails*, Kuttner established himself in the first rank of s-f comedy writers. The ten yarns in *Ahead of Time* show his skill at serious science-fiction. They are also indicative of his versatility.

But serious is a relative term in Kuttner's case, for overtones of satire can be sensed in most of these tales. The author's best asset is his irreverence, which both delights and scandalizes the scientific purist, while giving fresh

twists to essentially commonplace themes.

Here we find yarns about a twenty-first century ghost-breaker, a caste of head-hunters in future New York, a deranged time traveler, hillbilly survivors of Atlantis, peons scoffing at an extra-terrestrial peacemaker, robots committing suicide, and a fantasy version of Faust's bargain with the devil.

In one devastating instance the author gave a purposeful direction to his satire and produced a gem of social criticism—"Year Day." It's a portrait of tomorrow's super-advertising, shattering personal privacy. Every fan should read it. A book well worth having.

## THE LEGION OF TIME

by Jack Williamson. Fantasy Press. \$3.00.

This book ought not to have been published.

Or rather, "The Legion of Time" should never have been resurrected from the 1938 magazine in which it originally appeared.

It's so poorly written.

Story is about "two lovely wom-

en materializing from two conflicting possible future worlds." They haunt the hero because he has the power to determine which of the two will eventually come to exist.

Beguiling ideas, but not as Williamson embodied it in words.

"After World's End," another short novel included in the book, is no better.

## KING CONAN

by Robert E. Howard. 255 pages, \$3.00. Gnome Press, New York.

Admirers of swashbuckling fantasy should welcome this volume of Conan stories put together by L. Sprague de Camp from a group of manuscripts discovered in 1951, fifteen years after Howard's death. Conan is a barbarian-warrior pursuing adventure in the prehistoric Hyborian Age. Two previous books contained his popular magazine

series—*Conan the Conqueror* and *The Sword of Conan*.

This volume deals with his struggles in the period immediately before *Conan the Conqueror*, when Conan's battle-ax and sense of justice are earning him the crown of Aquilonia. *King Conan* is flamboyant blood-and-thunder, without depth or serious value, which however, cannot be denied its exotic appeal.

## WORLD OUT OF MIND

by J. T. M'Intosh. 222 pages, \$2.75. Doubleday, New York.

Your job and social rank in tomorrow's civilization are determined by tests. Afterwards you wear a badge—Brown, Red, Yellow, Orange, White, or some other color, revealing both your capacities and your privileges. The highest rank is White Star, symbolizing the top one per cent of one per cent of one per cent. Naturally, you're pleased to be governed by that elite group (and don't delude yourself by thinking you'll belong to it.)

The narrative begins with a dis-

guised alien of superhuman mentality taking the tests. His role is that of an infiltrator from another galaxy, landed on Earth in advance of a planned invasion. His orders are to become a member of the ruling White Star class so that he can sabotage Earth's defenses. He hits the jackpot on the tests, but because he has been endowed with every human characteristic he falls in love with a beautiful girl of that class, and eventually rebels against his assignment.

Shallow political concepts but entertaining reading.



## *Conducted by Mari Wolf*

THE ideas that were science fiction's not so very long ago belong to the general public now. It isn't only the ten year olds who're set to go to the Moon. The Colliers' Symposiums, and other articles in general circulation magazines have shown us just how the space stations will be set up and just how the monkeys in the baby stations will be studied by remote control for their reaction to the environment of space.

The amateur rocket builder is hopelessly outclassed, and the New Mexican desert is alive with missiles. The science fiction writer who describes the sensations of a man in a rocket ship and the functioning of the vehicle isn't extrapolating very far any more. Rockets have been built. Rockets have gone to space—for all practical purposes—ever since the V-2 boosted Wac Corporal climbed 250 miles

off the Earth back in 1949.

Men in jet planes have flown weightless, though only for short times. Men in centrifuges have been tested under as many g's as would be necessary to lift them free of Earth. Men have been exposed to heat, and to cold, and to a pressure drop almost great enough to boil their blood. In short, men have been tested almost to the biological limits of the species.

It's undoubtedly safe to say that, barring an annihilating war or other catastrophe, we'll have the space station within our lifetime. Men will know what it is to look down from space at the Earth, see with their own eyes the vistas of a Bonestell painting.

And it's no longer the dream of a few scattered people. The public shares it. The army works on the idea of a space station and space medicine. National magazines pub-

lish accounts of what the stations and the ships will be like, what training the crews will need.

It's a glorious vision of tomorrow. Up, the new frontier . . .

Or is it?

Dr. Heinz Haber, formerly with the department of Space Medicine at Randolph Field, and now with the Institute of Traffic and Transportation at UCLA, has written a book that will be familiar to a lot of science fiction readers. I hope it's familiar to you too. It's called *Man in Space* and it describes, better than anything else I've read, what space will probably be like environmentally, to the people who will actually live and work there.

Dr. Haber has been a space enthusiast for years. But, over the years, some of the rosy optimism of the dream of a rocket ship for everyone has faded. He sees the conquering of space not so much as the triumph of metals and structures and fuels and engineering, though of course these too are important factors. He sees space principally in its relation to Man, and not to the machine.

Where does space begin? Here Dr. Haber draws the difference in viewpoint between the physicist and the biologist. To the physicist, space begins where the last effects of the atmosphere cease—up around 600 miles. To the biologist, space begins where a man's body, designed for a terrestrial environment, can no longer function unless this environment is reproduced artificially.

Man needs an oxygen mask as close to the surface of the Earth as the tops of some of its highest mountains. Five miles up, and an oxygen mask is necessary for even

the most acclimatized mountaineers. Ten miles up—and an oxygen mask is worthless. Outside pressure has dropped so low that the pressure of carbon dioxide and water vapor within the lungs, pressure which is brought about by the functioning of the human organism and can't be lessened, is more than equal to the outside air pressure. The result—breathing is impossible. Carbon dioxide and water vapor, which usually make up about 11% of the lungs' gases, fill the entire lung area, and an attempt to inhale or exhale just forces them back and forth, into and out of the bloodstream.

At ten miles up, a pilot whose pressurized cabin fails will die just as quickly as he would ten thousand miles up.

Still, breathing difficulties aren't too hard to overcome. The pressurized cabin will obviously be a part of any space ship, as every science fiction fan, no matter how young or new to the field, has known for years.

As he moves farther into the book Dr. Haber brings out, one by one, the problems that man must overcome before he can live in space. Weightlessness, not just for a few seconds but day in and day out. The possibility of spinning the ship and substituting the pull of centrifugal force for normal gravity, and the Coriolis effects that would then arise—the objects that would fall not straight down as you might expect, but down and slightly to one side, because of the spinning motion of the ship. Not only will Coriolis forces act on inanimate objects; they'll act on man's muscles too, and the person

## IMAGINATION

who bends over to pick something up will have to compensate for the tendency of his arm and body to fall in a direction other than the normal down.

If the ship or station is weightless and not under any centrifugal force, the problem of man's orienting himself becomes very great. Dr. Haber points out most vividly the changes in sense perception, the loss of a sense of up or down, the fact that the weightless man will orient himself only with his eyes. To the science fiction reader this isn't new, perhaps, though I've never seen so much material gathered together into one place and so well presented. (And, of course, much of this material is based on experiments performed with space flight in mind, and not merely on a writer's extrapolations from past experience.)

Dr. Haber brings out the difficulties of temperature control, of keeping the space station environment within the narrow temperature range that human beings can adapt to. It isn't the cold of outer space that will be the problem—at least, not near our sun. It will be heat. Though empty space itself has no temperature, a body in space, unprotected by an atmosphere and exposed to the rays of the sun, will pick up heat. If people are to live in this body it will have to throw off heat also, throw off enough so that the people inside don't roast to death.

The shiny metal rocket ship of the science fiction magazines would be a furnace. The metal wouldn't absorb much heat, but what it did absorb it wouldn't throw off again. A hull of polished aluminum, in sunshine, would acquire a temper-

ature of over 800 degrees. Ceramic hulls would be much better. A white ceramic won't reflect as much sunlight as a metal, but it will radiate more, just as a stucco wall can be cool in the sunlight here on Earth while a polished chrome strip on your car can burn you. In a ceramic hulled ship, temperature can be kept within a livable range.

Meteorites in space have long been a subject for science fiction stories. An even greater problem, though, and one that has seldom been dealt with fictionally, perhaps because until recently very little data has been available, is cosmic radiation. Dr. Haber, who has done much research in the field of cosmic radiation and its biological effect, brings out the known facts and present day extrapolations from these facts very graphically.

These are just a few of the problems, physiological problems, that must be met and overcome before the *Age of Space* begins. These are psychological problems too. Dr. Haber touches on these, and on the research that still must be done in the field of Man's reaction to such an alien environment. And yet, he concludes that the problems will be overcome, that the space station will be built.

Tomorrow the satellite station, next week the planets and next month the stars? That's the way a lot of people, including many old time science fiction readers and writers see it. But that's not the way Dr. Haber sees it—and he's been working with the idea of space flight all his life.

The space station, yes. And perhaps the Moon. But the planets, Dr. Haber feels, are out of our reach, at least in the foreseeable

future. It will cost a fortune to build a space station, but it can be done. It would cost immeasurably more to go to Mars or Venus, and the results wouldn't be worth it. Nothing that could be brought back would justify the expense. There would be no incentive, not with fuels and present technology, not with anything that Dr. Haber can foresee in our time or our children's, that would be worth the cost.

To Dr. Haber, we are a wasteful race, squandering our natural resources recklessly, and it would be incalculably reckless to squander the wealth of Earth on a bid for the planets. There is a limit, he thinks, to what Man can do.

We do not control the Earth. We do not control the weather, harvests, floods, or famines. We do not control ourselves.

People are, perhaps, too optimistic now. The age of space flight is just around the corner, and everyone wants to get on the bandwagon.

In *Man in Space* Dr. Haber shows a truer picture, I think, of the problems we face and the difficulties that we will have to overcome. And the difficulties that we won't overcome—in our time.

\* \* \*

#### Now to the fanzines:

**DESTINY:** 25c; quarterly; 3477 North Clark St., Chicago 13, Ill. Editors Malcolm Willits and Earl Kemp maintain their high standard with every issue of this printed magazine. The content of the articles is challenging and varied. You'll find discussions here of the people who write, edit, illustrate and collect science fiction, and you'll find explored here the many facets of

science fiction and the many media in which it's expressed.

- This issue is dedicated to David H. Keller, MD, one of the old time big names in fantasy writing. Sam Moskowitz reminisces about Keller, his work and his career, and there also appears in the issue Keller's last story for any amateur magazine. It's "The Golden Key," and I'm sure you'll enjoy it.

Dr. Fred L. Whipple gives his answer to the question, "Why Conquer Space?" Like Willy Ley's and Arthur C. Clarke's answers to the same question in an earlier issue, Dr. Whipple's reasons are compellingly valid. I hope you read them for yourself.

\* \* \*

**BACCHANALIA:** Race Mathews, 8, Barnett Street, Hampton, S. 7, Victoria, Australia. There's no price listed for this new fanzine, but if you send for it I suggest you include sufficient money to pay for its being mailed, at least. Or, the exchange problem being what it is, drop a note to editor Mathews first . . .

It's a very well done zine, particularly so for a first issue. Dick Jenssen's cover is one of the best I've seen for a long time. Bacchanalia leans more to fantasy and weird than to straight science fiction. It's something a Lovecraft fan would really like—and if you're one you'll be interested in T.G.L. Cockcroft's "Random Notes on H. P. Lovecraft," an article followed by an H.P.L. checklist.

\* \* \*

**FANTASTIC WORLDS:** 30c; quarterly; Sam Sackett, 1449 Brockton Ave., Los Angeles 25, Calif. In this literary science fic-

tion magazine you'll find a good many stories of as high literary quality as those that appear in the best markets—but for one reason or another they're non-commercial. If you've ever been involved in the argument of Pure Art versus money you'll know what I mean. (And pure art can be undigestable fare, even for the artist.)

Sometimes it's hard to review a magazine like this one among fanzines. For one thing, it doesn't have a fanzine price. For another, it has so many more resources available to it, in format and printing and paper, than the average fan editor could hope to dream for. Yet there's a certain similarity in motive. FW is published for the love of the subject matter, and for the personal satisfaction of the staff—not for profit.

In the issue I have here there's Robert Bloch's article on horror movies, good and bad, "Calling Dr. Caligari!" Among the stories I think my favorite is editor Sackett's "The Horsemen." It's very simple, very well written, and it makes you think a while about the children you've just met briefly as characters . . .

\* \* \*

VEGA: 10c; monthly; Joel Nydahl, 119 S. Front St., Marquette, Mich. This issue makes me feel like a prophet. I remember the first VEGA I ever saw—I think it was about issue No. 2—and I remember thinking, "Joel's got something. He's going to have a top fanzine one of these days. One of my favorites, anyway . . ."

Now everyone seems to agree that Vega is a top fanzine, and Joel is one of the newest of the Big Name Fans, as well as having had his

first story published right here in MADGE. And his fanzine keeps getting better and better, though why, why, why have you cut down on fiction, Joel, especially yours?

In the current issue Bob Tucker writes an article about interlining, a common fan practice of throwing in lines of comment apropos of nothing else on the page and understandable only to a few other fans. Like all of Tucker's articles, this one's a beaut.

Bob Silverberg tells about his fanzine, "Spaceship," reviewed elsewhere, and there are columns by Gregg Calkins and Harlan Ellison, as well as lots of other fine features.

\* \* \*

**SPACESHIP:** 10c; quarterly; Bob Silverberg, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 13, N. Y. Spaceship is in its fifth year of publication now, rather unusual, since so many fanzines start out small, improve, become really good, and then collapse from their own momentum and the editor's inability to find time for such nonessentials as eating and sleeping. This one is different. It's good, really good, and keeps on staying right up on top, issue after issue.

The copy I have here features Richard Elsberry's "The Great Temptation," an article about the tendency for magazine editors to publish their own stories. Elsberry gives statistics and pennames too. It makes very interesting reading, especially if you weren't sure just who was who, sometimes.

Harlan Ellison, in the column "Fanzines in Profile," reviews Vega, which makes the switch complete, Vega having run Bob Silverberg's review of Spaceship. Then

there is Dean Grennell's story, "Signed, Sealed and Delivered," a two thousand word tale that manages to revolve around a pun. Or a homonym, if you want to be erudite. Oh well . . .

\* \* \*

**FANTASY-TIMES:** 10c; published twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd. Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y. There's a lot of news in the science fiction world, and you will find it all in Fantasy-Times. Who's going monthly, or bimonthly. Who's bought what magazine from whom. What new fantasy movies are coming out. And lots more.

Donald Ford reports on the slicks, Arthur Jean Cox on West Coast stf doings, and Michael Corper on British news. With this coverage, just about everything that happens that's of special interest to fans appears here. It's really the newspaper of the s-f field.

\* \* \*

**FAN TO SEE:** 10c; Larry Touzinsky, 2911 Minnesota Ave., St. Louis 18, Missouri. Here's a fanzine with some interesting articles on a great variety of topics. In the issue I have here Hal Shapiro, in his "Taint Necessarily So" discusses hoaxes—both fannish and otherwise. He gives quite an account of some well known international hoaxes, and then launches into an account of some of the stf affairs, such as the report that Bob Tucker was dead.

There are columns by Harlan Ellison, Paul Mittelbuscher, and Terry Carr—and a Flying Saucer Review column by Max Miller. Lots of variety here.

\* \* \*

**SF:** 15c; John L. Magnus, jr., 9312

Second Ave., Silver Springs, Maryland. Here's a top fanzine that features some of the best covers in the field. They're silk screen, or a process closely related thereto, and usually the designs are simple and very well spaced against the white background of the cover.

In the new issue there's an article on Paul Anderson by Editor Magnus, and a set of poems also by John, fannishly entitled "Fork River Anthology." The style you can guess, but the contents are quite original and science fictional.

Harlan Ellison writes "Is the World Ready?" The world he refers to is the science fiction world, and what it is or isn't ready for he describes as the detective story writer and the writer of general literature. Harlan really tears into the subject, too, and whether you agree with him wholly, not at all, or only in places, I think you'll like the way he expresses himself.

\* \* \*

**THE CHIGGER PATCH OF FANDOM:** 15c; published annually, Bob Farnham, 204 Mountain View, Roseville, Illinois. Bob Farnham and coeditor Nan Gerding actually publish this one once a year (issue number one came out a year ago, and this is number two.) They've got a good idea—publish infrequently enough so that putting out the zine doesn't become a chore instead of a pleasure, and so that good material can be saved up instead of having to be scrounged at the last minute.

There's a story by Noah McLeod called "Bubbette and the Bem," which is one of the best bits of lighter vein amateur stf I've run across lately. It's about what happens to a little girl who dives

through the Disposalette into another dimension . . .

\* \* \*

**STARLANES:** 20c; quarterly; Orma McCormick, 1558 W. Hazelhurst St., Ferndale 20, Michigan. Orma McCormick and coeditor Nan Gerdig put out this all poetry fanzine. If you like poetry, and would like to try some science fiction and fantasy poems, by all means send for this one. The list of contributors is much too long to review fairly; it's sufficient to say that just about every good fan poet is represented. You'll find all styles of writing and all moods. I'm sure you'll like it.

I especially liked Philip Jose Farmer's "Beauty in This Iron Age." Also Emili Thompson's "Unpeopled Stars." And there were many, many others too.

\* \* \*

**KAYMAR TRADER:** 10c; monthly; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave. So., Moorhead, Minnesota. Here's the fanzine for all you science fiction book and magazine collectors who want to add to your collections. Also, if you're new to the field of science fiction and find that the collecting bug is biting you, here's where you can look up magazines and books and their prices in the resale market. You won't find reviews here; you'll have to know what the titles refer to. Most of them are self-explanatory, listing issues of various magazines and titles and authors of various books you've heard about. Anyway, here they are. Years and years of them.

\* \* \*

**GEN TONES:** G. M. Carr, 8325-31st. NW, Seattle 7, Washington. Here's another zine from the Spectator Amateur Press Association, or

SAPS, mailing. G. M. Carr doesn't really sell this one—she trades it with other SAPS members, but send in a bit to pay for postage and handling, etc., and she might let you have one . . .

Each Gem Tones issue is named for a gem. There have been a lot of them already, but so far as I know, no repeats. The one I have here is the coral issue—all Coralated. (It's the editor's pun, not mine.)

This fanzine features some rather caustic comments and positive opinions on one side or the other of just about every subject science fictional. I love it.

\* \* \*

**PSYCHOTIC:** 10c; Richard E. Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon. Psychotic is a brand new fanzine that's a real surprise—it features, right from the first issue, some top notch writing and art work.

Editor Geis put out the first issue almost single handed. He did the cover, the illustrations for the whole zine, and about half the text. The art is most unusual for a fanzine. The cover is neither photographic nor cartoonlike. There's great detail work here, especially around the man's eyes . . . The illustrations, particularly those of the dejected ghost, manage to convey a lot of mood with just a few lines.

There's fiction, of which the best story is by Geis. But perhaps the most unusual thing about this fanzine is how good it looks. It's dittoed. And dittoed work is usually blurred, faded, and generally inferior in eye appeal. Not this one. Geis even manages three color illustrations, with the colors blending

one into another.

It's a very, very good first issue. Why not try it?

\* \* \*

Well, that's all there's room for this time. There were lots of new fanzines in the Box this time, and

there'll be lots more for the next review. Remember, if you have a fanzine you want reviewed send it to me, Mari Wolf, *Fandora's Box*, IMAGINATION, P. O. box 230 Evanston, Ill. See you next month.

—Mari Wolf

## INTRODUCING the AUTHOR



*Ross Rocklynne*



(Concluded from Page 2)

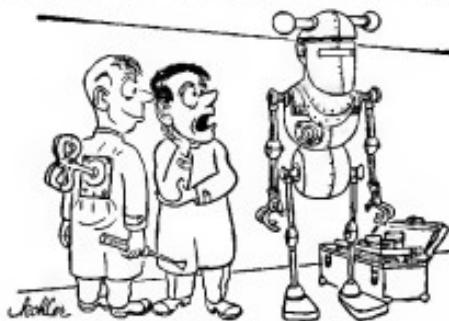
appeared in other stories. On the other hand, my other egos have also appeared, notably in a series of stories the last of which appeared in IMAGINATION'S February 1951 issue as "Revolt of the Devil Star", and the first of which was written in 1934, though published six years later. The last tale, as I recall, was thought to be a bit esoteric, and almost unnecessary to some readers. Esotericism it was, but it, and its predecessors, seemed to represent a real-life search for the "dark rebel" of that story. And

this egg-hunt, amongst other pursuits, still goes rather actively on.

You will see the results in future writings, I hope.

These observations *do*, somehow get us to the obvious place where X MARKS started, and that is 1913, Cincinnati, when I was born. And that, just as fast, gets up to 1935 when my first story was printed. Eighteen years later I'm sitting here at the typewriter, looking forward to many more of the same.

—Ross Rocklynne



"That's the most realistic robot I've ever seen, Thomas."

# Letters from the Readers

## SO MAD SHE'S GLAD!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

There's a first time for everything and this is a first for me; I think the October issue of Madge calls for a "fan letter."

I'll dispose of the short stories and then get to the meat of the matter: HEIR APPARENT—fair; COMBATMAN — different; SO SAYS THE MASTER — good; WORLD WITHOUT GLAMOR—real fine; THE IMPOSSIBLE PLANET — great; HOLD ONTO YOUR BODY—let's have more of these!

I started reading THE TIME ARMADA before I realized it was a serial, and I'm still red in the face from anger. I got really interested in the story and then—bam! Those hated words — concluded next month!—hit me in the eye . . . Here's something you probably didn't know; your magazine has good sailing quality—I bet it went 20 feet before it landed!

I hope I can stand it until the next issue so I can finish the novel!

Last but not least, let's have more cartoons . . .

Mrs. Marion L. Meyer  
1523 N. Palmetto St.  
San Antonio, Texas

*We hope your husband was sitting across the room when you threw the October issue, Marion. If so, what a break for him—to have a nice young lady like Madge tossed in his lap! . . . with*

## THE "SCREWBALL" STIGMA...

Dear Bill:

I liked the October issue of Madge very much. The shorts were good and the novel better. However, my main reason for writing this letter was not to compliment the current issue, but to say what I must concerning attitudes toward science fiction.

You may have seen the cartoon in Collier's several years ago concerning the hillbilly characters. One was walking through some hip-high weeds and grass carrying a jug of dream-juice on his shoulder. Two others were reclining

under a nearby tree, one saying to the other: "If'n Clem there takes three more steps he'll be in a bar trop. 'Course, it ain't none of my business."

The point is that this is the way a run-of-the-mill s-f reader concerns himself with the position of s-f. In fact, this is the way most people concern themselves about anything. At least we in science-fiction can do something (if we will!) about forwarding ideas in s-f, mentioning it whenever possible. Give that friend your extra copy of a s-f magazine. In other words, let people begin to know science-fiction as it really is. You think this sounds silly? It isn't.

Although s-f is almost as popular as detective or western material, it is still a big joke in magazine form to most of the populace. Even my dad calls it some silly teenagers'

idea.

People apparently will not accept something that is "fantastic"—or that they are afraid of. The idea of rocket travel is still scorned by people who appear to be experts on the subject. S-f readers are usually referred to as a group of "odd" people, or "dreamers". Well, perhaps we are dreamers—but let's not forget that the dreamers have been responsible for all the advancements of humanity!

I've been a s-f fan and reader for about four years now and I've been ridiculed and laughed at as much as the next fellow, so now I've gotten used to it—but must this be a "normal" reaction for science fiction enthusiasts to expect? Must we be referred to as a nitwit group?

Facing the facts, isn't the s-f fan the person who has a little foresight to envision space flight? Isn't

## SCIENCE-FICTION

BOOKS & BACK DATED MAGAZINES. Science fiction and fantasy books and back dated magazines (Astounding, Galaxy, Unknown, etc) bought and sold. Lowest prices. List free of several thousand items. CURRENT TOP-SELLER: "The Books of Charles Fort," all four of Fort's books in one huge 1125 page volume, containing complete contents of the original editions of "Book of the Damned," "Wild Talents," "New Lands," and "Lo." There are just naturally no other books like these in the world. They contain thousands of actual, documented occurrences that fall way outside the boundaries of our arbitrarily tidy human sciences and fields of knowledge, completely unexplainable happenings. For just a few examples, there are dozens of documented instances of teleportation, of astronomical and geological enigmas and "impossibilities," and of space ships seen repeatedly during the past three centuries (not just since 1947!). Incidentally, that's why the Army issued these books to all Project Saucer Investigators.

If you read these four books, your orderly, safe and sane little world will never again look the same to you. Your money back in full and with a smile (of pity), if you don't find that's true, and can bear to part with these fascinating books and return them within a month! With non-fiction books coming out nowadays at \$3.50 to \$5.95 per book, you'd expect these four Fort books to cost a total of anywhere from \$14.00 to \$23.80. They don't. They come to only \$2.49 per book, \$9.90 for the entire, huge, four-book volume, postpaid, and with my money-back guarantee. If you're not satisfied, in fact, stupefied! And if you order right now (which will help me meet the cost of this ad!) I'll include a copy of a superb Fortean novel by a top SF author at no extra cost, with your "Books of Charles Fort," thus lowering your cost per book to only \$1.99. Good enough? Send check, cash, or Money-Order to:

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the sf fan the one who would be least confounded or panicked were there an invasion of our planet?

I've talked to people who refuse to consider the possibility of extra-terrestrial life because the thought was sacrilegious! Actually, it is people such as those who are to be pitied, not us. We have the intelligence to realize that there may be others in this universe more intelligent than we—or things more important in the universe than us. All one has to do is consider the vast magnificence of the universe—in conjunction with our little fly-speck on a window pane. Or think of a space ship—an atom in comparable size—attempting to cross the immensity of interstellar space. I think it is such thoughts that actually frighten people—and so they ridicule science fiction to justify their fears . . . What can science fiction do to speed their awakening?

Sam Johnson  
1517 Penny Drive  
Edgewood

Elizabeth City, N. C.

*Quite a thought-provoking letter, Sam, and one that certainly merits reader commentary. As for us, we touched on the heart of the subject, perhaps, in our editorial for the September issue. It seems to us that people accept something only after it has gained mass approval. "Going along with the crowd," seems the safest course for most to follow. The things we talk about—predict—in science fiction are not fact as yet, i.e., space flight; thus people scoff and consider us part of the lunacy fringe. The same people, incidentally, who would have scoffed at the atom*

*bomb and its unbelievable destructive power a few short years ago. Today the atom is here, to stay and people accept it; tomorrow space flight will be here—the backbone of science fiction—and once that happens you can look for the biggest popularity boom in literary history. Suddenly we'll be "discovered" and the ridicule will strangely become praise . . . You'll be seeing this happen within a decade, we predict! In the meantime, your idea about spreading science fiction is a good one. How about it, gang? . . . . . wlh*

#### A LUCKY BROKEN LEG!

Dear Bill:

The first time I saw a copy of IMAGINATION was at the end of July. Up to then I had read only *Galaxy* and *Astounding*, plus the latest science fiction pocket books. . . . I had just returned from the hospital (a broken leg!) and had a lot of time for reading. My father brought me a dozen current science fiction magazines, Madge included. I enjoyed the magazine thoroughly, the stories as well as the features.

I was a bit skeptical at first; I thought that maybe it was an accident that your magazine was so good—maybe it was only that issue. Well, I never bought further copies of the other eleven stf books, but I waited until the next issue of Madge came out; I hobbled down to the newsstand and found it—the October issue. I read it the same day and became convinced that Madge's quality was no accident. Well, I can't stand it any longer, I'm subscribing right

now!

I vow to read every issue of Madge until all the stories come true—in newspaper headlines!.

Harvey Segal  
2105 Walton Ave.  
New York 53, N. Y.

*We're sorry about the broken leg, Harvey, but as long as it introduced you to IMAGINATION it served a useful purpose . . . Maybe we ought to buy ourselves a baseball bat and do a lot of other people some favors, huh? . . . . wlh*

### LET'S GO WEEKLY!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I would like to tell that "voice from the chasm", Joe Kinne, (October letter column) to DROP DEAD! If he doesn't like our beloved Madge then he doesn't have to read it!—Maybe he doesn't deserve to!

I, for one, read every issue of Madge from cover to cover, and would be happier only if you could make the magazine a weekly publication. I like all the stories—especially the long ones—the cartoons, your editorial, and I just can't understand anyone who doesn't like FANDORA'S BOX. They certainly can't be true s-f fans if they don't enjoy reading about fellow fans.

About the covers, please, more like the July issue, and keep up the back covers as I am collecting them. Honestly, I just can't stop praising Madge enough. The October issue was really fine, and I can't wait to finish reading THE TIME ARMADA in November. As far as the forthcoming SKY LIFT is con-

cerned, I cut my teeth on Robert Heinlein!

Oh, yes, one thing: What is the two motor plane doing in the interior illustration for THE TIME ARMADA in the October issue? I thought it was to depict the future—while planes of this type are almost a thing of the past now!

Diana Jensen  
4425 Beulah Drive  
La Canada, Cal.

*Actually, if you will recall, Diana, the story does not concern the future but a parallel time-world. However, we'll grant you that in the apparently advanced technology suggested, a two engine plane appears to be incongruous. Our error . . . . . wlh*

### YOU SCHMOE!—THAT'S US . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Okay, Bill, prepare for a tirade. This is a very nasty letter. I never thought I'd write one to one of my favorite magazines, nor to one of my favorite (up to now, that is) editors, but you have hurt my feelings!

First, about the sensationally big play you give Heinlein. Don't you think you overdid it just a bit? Bob is *one of* s-f's top writers, but not quite all you say he is. I could name 2 or 3 about as good, (Van Vogt, St. Reynard) and one head and shoulders above him: Ray Bradbury!

Any editor who can make a statement like you did about Ray in your book department not only reveals a curious deficiency in taste, judgment, and scope, but also can go jump in the lake! Mr. B is the greatest writer S-F has ever seen!

And Ward Moore, although not quite as fine as Ken Crossen says he is, has superb novelistic talent that should be appreciated.

Pardon me, Bill, I shouldn't be criticizing you, should I? It's your book reviewer, Mark Reinsberg, who's the villain. Right after blasting Moore and Bradbury he praises their stories in the anthology he reviews! What a schmoe! Get rid of him, Bill—he contaminates the magazine! And just to give Madge readers an opportunity to read Mr. B's work as well as Heinlein's, get Bradbury to write for you. Please? —You schmoe!

Peter Kreeft  
26 Richardson Ave.  
Haledon, N. J.

*Since a schmoe is quite a talented and valuable beastie, the compliment is gratefully accepted! Or is it schmoo? Ah, well, they sound so much alike . . . We should apologize for building up the fact that Madge scooped the field with Heinlein's newest story? . . . You got holes in your head or sumpin'? Wait until we get his next story! . . . Mark Reinsberg is not the villain you make him out. If you'll re-read his review you'll glean the obvious (to us) fact that Mark was criticizing the linking of Moore's name to that of Bradbury as "The finest s-f writers today." As Mark commented on the matter just the other day, "That's as far-fetched as putting Mickey Spillane alongside William Shakespeare." Now Ward Moore is a good writer, don't misunderstand, but he is not, in our collective opinions at any rate, in the same class with Ray Bradbury. If Crossen(who showed a remarkable lack of aptitude with*

*his subject) had combined Bradbury and Heinlein in such a statement it would have made sense. So apology is not in order. Us schmoes stand accused—but not convicted!*

*. . . As to a Bradbury story in Madge, we ran one several years ago, so we haven't ignored the master. If Ray reads this, we'd like to repeat the pleasure in the near future . . . . . wlh*

#### RE PHOTO COVER DATA

Dear Bill:

Want to know a secret? I'm getting to like Madge. At first I picked it up because it is science fiction. Later, I began to get real interested in the stories. Now Madge is a regular with me.—If I had enough dough I'd subscribe, but alas, I'm just a poor working stiff buying a TV set, a typewriter (to write s-f, of course!), and various and sundry items of necessity.

The July and October issue photo covers were both terrific. Keep them coming. But just one thing, please put the name of the astrophotographic background somewhere around where we can see it! Interesting backgrounds would be a Nebula, the Magellanic Clouds, a closeup of the Moon, the Horsehead double star, an eclipse of the sun, and any number of others.

In the October issue THE TIME ARMADA seems to be shaping into a pretty good thing. Tell you more after I read the concluding part! (Curses on all serials—why don't you run a complete novel and eliminate the shorts?)

M. Desmond Emery  
93 Hemlock St.  
St. Thomas, Ont., Canada

Who's just a poor working stiff? Don't feel so darned exclusive, pall! Aren't we all? But we know what you mean about those various and sundry items of necessity. Food capsules still being in the realm of science fiction, we regularly invest young fortunes for a few pounds of grub. Along those lines, Madge doesn't cost a young fortune—just three bucks a year—and it makes a darn nice dessert every month, so why not include the young lady on your grocery list? . . . You've got a good point about the photo-cover backgrounds; we'll see that all such future covers are so credited in the issue. Running complete novels in an issue is a good idea — but why eliminate

shorts? We're working out a method of giving you both. Big secret yet . . . . . with

## SCIENCE GLOSSARY SECTION

Dear Mr Hamling:

During the months I read your magazine I never really read the letters in the back of each book. Most of the time I just glanced through them. The other night, however, having finished the stories in the latest issue, I turned to the letters. After reading a few I really got interested. So here's mine!

I like Madge because it is quite easy to understand. It is more simplified than most fiction maga-



"Bradley, you know what the regulations have to say about fraternizing with the natives!"

## IMAGINATION

zines. However, there are a few words, or scientific terms, that are hard to digest. I looked up some of the words in a science dictionary but the definitions didn't give a clear picture of the meaning. Therefore, I am asking that you have a small glossary in the back of *Madge* to help us understand the words more thoroughly and easily.

Carol Baker

62-31 59th Dr.  
Maspeth 78, N. Y.

An excellent suggestion, Carol. We'll be glad to include a new feature—if you readers will provide the material; that is, let us know what words or terms bother you and we'll give a breakdown on them . . . . . wlh

## HARD COVER BINDERS

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have just finished reading the October issue of *IMAGINATION*. I thought that *THE IMPOSSIBLE PLANET* was among the top stories of the issue, and although I've only read the first part of *THE TIME ARMADA*, I think it is going to be one of the best stories you've ever had.

Keep up the cartoons and science briefs at the ends of stories!

One thing I would like to suggest is a binder to keep either six or twelve issues of *Madge* in. This would solve a problem for collectors like myself to keep the magazines in good shape. As a suggestion, you could have binders made of a hard cover with the letters *IMAGINATION* embossed in gold on the front and backbone. I would like to see how many other readers go for this idea . . . And keep

up the good work on my favorite magazine!

James Simmons  
713 Langston Ct.  
Orlando, Fla.

*We'd like to know what the gang thinks too, Jim. How many votes for such a binder? . . . . wlh*

## WINNING COMBINATION

Dear Mr. Hamling:

After reading the first part of *THE TIME ARMADA* by Fox B. Holden, and also your announcement of a Heinlein story in the November issue, I find myself subscribing to a science fiction magazine for the first time. This is because I generally like to pick and choose, but the combination you picked was a winner.

Mr. Holden will go a long way if he doesn't fall into the error of most writers — writing the same plot over and over. He has a writing personality that I hope will develop as time goes on.

I like *Madge's* cartoons, but the story illustrations could be better, though they're certainly not terrible. Your stories are entertaining, and so is the letter column—because you print a variety of viewpoints without stooping to the "drooling moron" type of letter found elsewhere.

Nicholas Mutoglis  
14416 Seymour  
Detroit 5, Mich.

*We'll go along with your prediction that Holden is a writer to watch. Madge has published many of his shorts, and his first novel. We're waiting for Fox to send his new one in, and having met and talked*

*to Fox at the recent World Science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia, we can assure you that he's not the kind of writer who will get himself in a rut. He's loaded with ideas! And Madge can promise you a corner on them . . . wlh*

### LOUSY SERIAL—BUT GOOD STORY!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Ever since I picked up my first issue of *Madge* (December 1952) I haven't missed one. I tried several others, including *Astounding*, but have never found anything to measure up to *Madge*. Keep up the good work.

Now for my one gripe; I've just finished the October issue and ran into something which lowers *Madge's* rating a lot with me—a serial. Up to now one of your biggest attractions has been complete stories in each issue. I sure hope you don't slip up again! Keep the stories up to the same high quality as *THE TIME ARMADA*, but not as serials, please!

Bob Foster  
4035 S. Clarkson  
Englewood, Colo.

*Since it would have been impossible to run the Holden novel complete in one issue, its use as a serial is certainly justified with the fact that it is a terrific story. After all, isn't that what you want us to do—print the best stories possible? We don't like the idea of serials any more than you do—having to wait to finish a story—but a good story shouldn't be rejected because its length necessitates serialization. Don't you agree? . . wlh*

### GEM OF A STORY

Dear Bill:

*HEIR APPARENT*, by Alan E. Nourse in the October issue finally induced in me the necessary impetus to write you a letter. That story was a well-worked little gem, one that I shall remember for a long while, if I ever forget it! A bouquet to Nourse for writing it, and three cheers to you for publishing it. It was good credit to your editorial ability to secure so fine a yarn.

Incidentally, I see where *Madge* recently placed second in a poll conducted by the fan publication, *A LA SPACE*. You missed tying *Galaxy* for 1st honors by one vote! I agree—*Madge* is a fine magazine.

One remark, belatedly, on the Smith photo-cover for the July issue. I couldn't believe it was a photo cover. I had expected much better. I've seen better covers that were painted instead of the intricate process Smith used. He is undoubtedly a fine artist, and as a camera enthusiast I can appreciate the work done on it, but the overall effect wasn't good, at least in my opinion. I've never really liked *Madge's* covers, anyway. I think you can do much better.

*IMAGINATION* publishes consistently entertaining stories, however, and *FANDORA'S BOX* is my favorite feature of any magazine!

Don Howard Donnell  
5425 Santa Monica Blvd.  
Los Angeles 29, Cal.

*The Nourse story was a gem, we agree. And speaking of Al, we have another beautiful yarn of his coming up very soon . . . We had*

been informed of the poll results you mention, and it made us quite proud. Matter of fact, the way the votes turned out it was practically a tie for 1st place any way you look at it. We hope Horace doesn't mind—we're the first to say he's got a fine book. What really surprised us though was the fact that Astounding didn't place 1st or 2nd in fandom's hardcore preference. Speaking of Galaxy, Astounding, and Madge, you might call them the "big three" in the field: they're monthly, each 160 pages, and the top favorites. We heartily recommend all three! Sorry you didn't care for Malcolm Smith's photo cover; many readers have acclaimed it as the best cover ever to appear on a science fiction magazine . . . . . wth

#### PLEASANTLY SURPRISED

Dear Bill:

I have just finished my first copy of IMAGINATION. When I bought it at the newsstand (October issue) I had the darndest feeling that I would not enjoy it. But I was pleasantly surprised and really liked it.

Two stories in particular that I would like to comment on: THE IMPOSSIBLE PLANET by Philip K. Dick. This story was the pinnacle of literary quality. It has made Dick one of my favorite writers. The other story is Alan E. Nourse's HEIR APPARENT. Another fine example of good science fiction without the use of three-headed BEM's.

Now that I think of it, I also enjoyed SO SAYS THE MASTER by Daniel F. Galouye. It was a good

moving story.

Sorry, I don't like serials, no matter how good they are! Serials always seem to lose something from one issue to another. (I'm crazy?)

I'd like to join a fan correspondence club . . . so . . .

Fred Seegmueller  
East Market St.  
Philadelphia 28, Pa.

You're not crazy, Fred, just plain old-fashioned stubborn! Tell you what, reader John Walston in the closing letter for the month has a solution to your gripe . . . . wth

#### SAVE THAT SERIAL!

Dear Bill:

The photo-cover on the October issue was superb. More!

THE TIME ARMADA I can't report on as yet as I always save all parts of a serial before reading it. I suggest you mention this as a solution to other readers who find serials a problem.

HEIR APPARENT was very good. I think Ben lost in the end . . . COMBATMAN was good. A dim view of old homely sap in my opinion! SO SAYS THE MASTER was excellent. THE IMPOSSIBLE PLANET, fair. Too old a plot for me. HOLD ONTO YOUR BODY was good, cute—"nuff said.

When do we see more TOFFEE?  
John Walston.  
Vashon, Wash.

Charlie Myers has recently completed a new TOFFEE novel, and as soon as we can work it in you'll see your favorite spitfire gal . . . Which about winds up shop for now. And from all of us at Madge, to all of you, a Very Happy Holiday Season . . . . . wth

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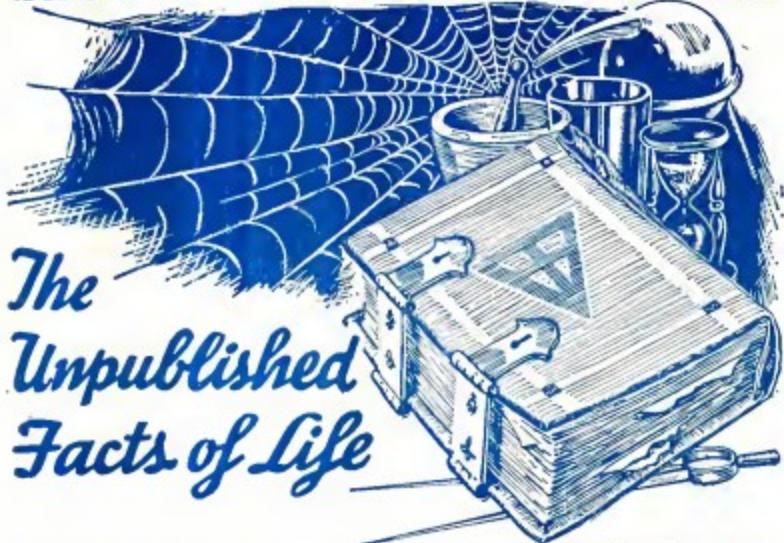
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City \_\_\_\_\_



## TOMORROW'S SCIENCE

**SPIRAL NEBULA IN URSA MAJOR:** 200 inch telescope photograph shows distant star field as some fiery cart-wheel in void. Among trillions of planets there, intelligent life may be observing us — as in **PERIL OF THE STARMEN**. Turn to page 6.

Another scan  
by  
cape1736

